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ARGOSY

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Till Spring

BIRDS as bright as sparkles of wine
Fly in the night to the Argentine,
Birds of azure and flame-birds go
To the tropical Gulf of Mexico :
They chase the sun, they follow the heat,
It is sweet in their bones, O sweet, sweet, sweet !
Yet it's not with them that I'd love to be,
But under the roots of the balsam tree.

Just as the spiniest chestnut-burr
Is lined within with the finest fur,
So the stony-walled and snow-roofed house
Of every squirrel and mole and mouse
Is lined with thistledown, seagull's feather,
Velvet mullein-leaf, heaped together
With balsam and juniper, dry and curled,
Sweeter than anything else in the world.

O what a warm and darksome nest
Where the wildest things are hidden to rest !
It's there that I'd love to lie and sleep,
Soft, soft, soft, and deep, deep, deep !

ELINOR WYLIE, 1888-1928

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THE DEAL

Here was a man to be reckoned with

by M. GILBERT

INTO the rich sunlight of the early morning came the gypsies. Market day was an infallible magnet for them; today they had brought horses to sell and great baskets of pegs and dyed teazles.

When they reached the edge of the market they paused and gathered round, talking quickly and quietly amongst themselves, the horses shifting a little from one foot to another and blinking at nothing as their masters muttered together. For a moment, the group seemed painted there upon the dusty white of the square, backed by the deep morning shadows from the huddled houses at the far side, surrounded by their patient horses with their shining skins.

The men all wore dark clothes that accentuated their slimness and haughtiness of bearing; the women, their glinting hair pulled back with coloured combs and ribbons, seemed as free and graceful in their poised stillness as if they had worn drapery instead of the bright voluminous skirts of a century-old and almost ageless fashion.

When the group broke up, it was as if a huge blossom had spilt its petals in all directions. The tall women and the girls moved off, chattering excitedly; the men led the horses away to the market, looking round them with quick observant eyes that missed no gathering of farmers nor busy stalls.

Two horses were left behind, those that had brought the heaviest of the baskets, and a boy remained in charge of them. He stood between them, holding their bridles, happy with an animal content in the gold warmth of the sun, watching nothing and seeing nothing, his dark lashes fretted with the light. After some ten minutes, he turned his head and rubbed his tangle of black hair against the equally black mane of the nearest horse.

They were a startling pair; the horse's skin, as black as a raven's feathers, shone till it was almost colourless with light; the boy's thin swarthy face, with its arrogance of eyes and nose, and thin-lipped mouth that could so easily have sneered or become sullen, but was now curved to a humorous tenderness, merited a second glance from even the most unobservant.

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The boy took his hand from the bridle of the other horse and passed it over the black horse's left eye, knocking away the flies that tormented him. The great eyelid, soft with its black lashes, closed for a moment and opened again, and the horse shifted heavily nearer to the boy, his shoulder pushing against him and nearly unbalancing him. But the boy pressed back, chuckling, and the horse blew down his nostrils.

A voice spoke into the almost silent sunlit play of boy and horse.

" How much do you want for the black horse ? " it said.

The boy stiffened and his teeth clenched as he turned slowly, feeling for the bridle of the second horse, and narrowing his eyes into the glare of the sun. The man who had spoken moved forward a little so that his shadow fell across the boy's face and he could see him properly. He was a tall well made man, of the most prosperous type of farmer in this valley country below the hills.

The boy looked full at him. " He's not for sale," he said, in the truest Romany sing-song.

The farmer jerked his head. " You'd accept a good price, wouldn't you ? " he said. The boy's hand tightened on the bridle.

" He's not for sale," he repeated.

" I'll come back when the rest of your people return," said the farmer. He moved away across the square, and the boy's eyes followed him with an expression of hatred. He stood stiffly and impassively, unresponsive to the black horse's nuzzling at his shoulder, until the first of the gypsies sauntered back through the crowds to where he stood on the edge of the shifting coloured mass of people round the stalls.

" Hey, Faraon," called one of the men, " gone to sleep ? " They chuckled and came up round him.

" Do you want me any more ? " he asked, suddenly turning his head. " Can I take anything back to camp ? "

" We'll wait for the women," said the tallest of the gypsies. " They'll not be long. We've money enough for a bit of something extra to eat. Then we'll be away back to camp."

Faraon opened his mouth to speak again and then shut it abruptly as he saw the farmer approaching.

All the gypsies turned at the sound of his voice and surveyed him with their arrogant gaze. He returned it squarely. The tallest gypsy spoke.

" The black's still not for sale, mister," he said.

" I'll pay a very good price," said the farmer imperturbably.

The gypsies recognized a man of their own mettle and suddenly grinned. Their deep set eyes lit up with a glint of appreciation like

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the sudden shifting of clouds before the face of the sun and its blaze upon unshadowed water.

Manfariel, the leader, spoke again. "Mister, the black's not for sale," he repeated, as one would to an insistent child.

This time the farmer grinned. He mentioned a price that made the gypsies exchange a quick glance; perhaps he was a fool, after all. The boy holding the horses watched Manfariel anxiously, his strong white teeth fixed in his lower lip.

The gypsy pursed up his mouth. "We like the animal," he said, "but we're feeling generous. You could have it for ten shillings more than that."

The farmer inclined his head slightly. "We'll say a pound less than my original offer," he said.

Manfariel lifted a lean filthy hand in a gracious gesture of refusal. "We could not part with him for that," he said. There was a slight pause, not of hesitation but rather of a subtle summing-up on both sides.

"I offer you ten shillings less than the first offer," said the farmer calmly. "I want the horse."

Manfariel turned and took the bridle from the boy's slack hand, and led the horse forward. "He is yours," he said, and his bow was beyond criticism. The farmer took out his wallet and paid the notes into Manfariel's half-condescending palm. Then, with a nod to the watching gypsies, he took the bridle and led the horse away across the square, now hot with the approaching noon.

Manfariel spat. "We did well," he said.

"You only sold him because you're already full of money," said Faraon hotly. "It wasn't up to you, anyway."

Manfariel turned and hit him across the face. "When we want your opinion we'll ask for it," he said angrily. "Keep your ruddy mouth shut."

The others shrugged their shoulders and turned to talk. Faraon stood motionless, holding the bridle of the remaining horse, one side of his face red with the blow he had received, his eyes smarting with tears of anger and loneliness.

The women came back laughing together. "Where's the black?" asked one of them suddenly, and they all looked questioningly at the men. Manfariel became slightly self-conscious.

"We sold it," he said, "for a very good price."

"Fools!" said the oldest of the women bitingly. "We'll not have enough horses for next summer at this rate. He was worth ten of the others, besides being a beauty."

Manfariel blustered. "You'll be glad when you know how much we got," he said. The old gypsy turned away impatiently.

"Here, boy," she said to Faraon, "give me a lift up on to this

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one." Faraon did as he was told. She looked down at his sullen face and gripped hands.

" You were fond of the black, weren't you, child ? " she said. He nodded without speaking, looking at the ground. She patted his shoulder for a few seconds, half in comfort, half in rumination. " Yes," she said, " he was a good horse." Then she turned.

" Come on, you sons of bitches," she said. The men followed her in a slightly guilty group. The women laughed. Then they picked up their empty baskets and went too.

During the next few days, Faraon moved in a stupor of misery about the camp. His life seemed empty for him without the black horse. When he came from the caravan into the breathless shadowed beauty of the dawn there was no stir among the tethered horses on the far side of the glade, no sudden shifting and glint of black skin as he went towards them and unfastened the ropes and led them beyond to the river and then to the marshy meadows. When he went for milk to the nearest farm, he walked, and did not try to persuade Micah, the old man, to let him ride.

The winding lanes and the berried hedges, the quiet corners of damp tall grass, the turn past the orchard where he had reached up to pick the last red apple, and the last lingering cluster of hazel nuts, the chequered light and shade of the birch and ash glade where the caravans were pitched, and the musing spirals of smoke from the breakfast fires; no longer had these any meaning for him. They existed, and he moved amongst them, as unfeeling as they, save for a heavy stone of sorrow that lay somewhere between his ribs.

The gypsies said amongst themselves that he would get over it, noticing his quiet face and shadowed eyes, and the listlessness of his body as he sat on the river bank watching the other men play like otters beneath the low branches and across the broad, brilliant path of the sun on the water. Sometimes they were impatient with him, but it was not because of his misery but rather because of a nagging feeling of guilt within themselves.

They could manage without the black horse, but they, too, missed him, with his affectionate whinnies and shining magnificence of coat and mane. When they saw Faraon slowly grooming the remaining horses they hissed sympathetically beneath their breath and scratched their heads in perplexed understanding.

When the women next went into town, Faraon went too. He mingled with the crowds and watched for the man who had bought the black. His luck was in, for he saw him, and enquired of one of the townsfolk where he lived. The man told him, glancing sideways at him a little suspiciously.

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The gypsy thanked his informant quietly and moved away. The women found him waiting for them where they had left him, and one of the girls, touched by the loneliness of his eyes, pinned a small bunch of flowers that remained on to his black coat with a safetypin from her skirt. He glanced at her, startled by her sympathy, and then was suddenly shy, lowering his smooth-browed eyes to the splash of gold on his lapel, ten times brighter than the dirty yellow of his neckerchief. She chuckled and went swiftly among the other women again.

That same evening when the gypsies had scattered among the misty silver of the birches to rest and smoke before the evening meal, Faraon slipped away. The farm he had been told of was not far from the encampment, and within ten minutes, loping swiftly down the lanes between the long-shadowing hedges, he had reached it.

He lurked around outside for a while, and then, seeing no one about, slipped into the stable yard. He went swiftly from one loosebox to another, like a black shadow in the crisp brownness of the darkening yard, but in none did he find the black horse. He paused at the far end, thinking hard.

The nights were still mild, and the gypsy horse was used to them; perhaps the farmer had realized this and would leave him out in the fields. The thought was no sooner conceived than translated into action; he was away out of the yard like a swallow.

A swift reconnaissance from the silent hedges revealed three fields empty in the dusk. He came, doubtfully, to the fourth, backed by the slope of a down, and parted the tangled mass of hips and haws to peer through. In the soft purple of the twilight he saw a dark head-drooped shape on the far side of the field. He let out his breath in an excited hiss.

Then he called, softly at first, so that the horse only pricked an unseen ear. Then a little louder; there was a sudden whinny, a wheeling of that darker shadow and a thud of joyous hooves across the grass.

Faraon pushed through the hedge, regardless of torn clothes and skin, and flung his arms round the great black head that pushed at him in the dusk, rubbing his cheek against the excited blowing nostrils. "Hush," he whispered, "someone will hear you."

He stood calming the horse with a great joy in his heart. He was his—despite money exchanged and parting of body—his horse for ever. He loved him. And then, for the first time, the realization of his loss became more than dumb misery. It was a stab of pain as sharp as a knife between his ribs. A hard sob broke from him and he was suddenly crying, as a child cries at a loss almost beyond

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comprehension, silently, with the tears slipping quietly down his cheeks and an almost unbearable ache in his throat. The horse, feeling the tension of his master's body, brought his ears forward enquiringly. Faraon saw the movement through the darkness and reached up and fondled them.

"I must go," he whispered, "they'll be angry with me." Then, inarticulate with what he wanted to express, he turned and pushed back through the bushes. The horse followed him, blowing questioningly. Faraon heard him on the far side of the hedge.

"Goodbye," he whispered, backing away. The horse let out an anxious, lonely whinny. Faraon suddenly turned and ran; he could not bear that. He heard it again, and ran faster, stopping his ears with the palms of his hands, knowing with an even more terrible agony that the horse was as lonely as he.

Everyone looked up as he drew into the circle of the firelight, noticing the blood on his scratched hands and cheek. "Where have you been?" asked Micah, the leader of the tribe.

"Down by the river," said Faraon, scraping at the earth with one foot. "It was quieter there."

He lifted his head and tried to pretend that he had been enjoying himself. The others looked away, not liking him to see that they no more believed his acting than he thought they did.

Micah nodded. "All right, boy," he said, "we only wondered."

When Faraon had gone, Manfariel shifted uneasily in his seat on the caravan steps. The old woman who had been angry with him on market day nodded at him grimly.

"I want to make a suggestion," he said, clearing his throat. Micah looked sideways at him, and the other gypsies glanced up in surprise, the flames casting shadows upwards into their eyes and the hollows of their cheeks, transforming them into a set of unbelievably handsome fiends.

"Go on," said Micah.

Manfariel seemed to be feeling for words. He looked round at the assembled faces. "It was my fault," he said, "that the horse was sold. I'm sorry. He was a good horse and we all liked him."

There was nodded agreement all round the circle. It seemed to give Manfariel courage.

"There are other horses," he went on, "among those left that are nearly as good from the work point of view, but not so well-liked. My suggestion is that we exchange what we sold."

He held his breath immediately he had spoken, and then glanced furtively from face to face, avoiding Micah's eyes. But

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the old man laughed, and the approval in the gleaming eyes around him reassured him as he looked up.

"It had to come sooner or later," said Micah, puffing at his ancient filthy pipe, "and an honest exchange is no robbery, after all, though I don't think it was your idea." He glanced at the old woman, who gave him a sudden delighted toothless grin. All the gypsies chuckled. They had guessed also.

"We've been very fair," went on Micah, "in our dealings with this piece of country." He looked round with an unspeakable humour in his old eyes, and the gypsies, while composing their faces decently to agreement, answered his look with an equally fierce enjoyment.

"We'll try a bit of swapping, though very carefully, I think. The police are a bit quicker than they used to be. But, yes, I think it could be managed. Our best way would be to move on tomorrow so that everyone sees us go. Then some of us will return tomorrow night, Faraon amongst them, and retrieve our property."

There were grunts and murmurs of approval. "I think it's your job, Manfariel, to find out from Faraon where the horse is kept. Don't let him know till tomorrow night what we're going to do."

A great ripple of pleasure went through the gypsies. They were like children invited to a party, and when Manfariel went off into the darkness to find Faraon, they called up their fiddler and started to sing, their voices winding among the tree trunks further than the reflection of their fire, and waking the autumn night to a very shudder of excitement.

Manfariel found him squatting in the shadow of his grandfather's caravan. "Faraon," he called softly. The boy turned his head. "You've seen the horse, haven't you?" asked Manfariel.

"Yes," said Faraon.

"Where is he, boy?" asked the older gypsy, dropping down beside him into the shadow. Against the noise of the singing, he heard Faraon let out his breath in a long sigh.

"In the farm up the Rodbourne Road," he said, "but at least he hasn't put him in a stable."

There was a long silence. "I'm sorry, Faraon," said Manfariel; "it was my fault, and I'm sorry. Will you believe me?"

"Yes," said the boy, "yes, but it doesn't matter now; it's over."

Manfariel got up and left him, sitting quietly amongst the rustle of the night, watching with unseeing eyes the coming and going of the fire-shadows in the wood.

He was surprised the next morning when told that the camp

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was moving. Everyone else seemed to know, so he surmised that it must have been decided round the fire when he was not there. He helped to clear up in silence, thinking that, perhaps, it was best that they left the place so that he could not be too near what he had lost.

They moved faster than usual, passing by back roads towards the downs, where the villages were fewer. Riding on the driving board of a caravan, Faraon looked down on the horses' backs and the tags of blue and red ribbon in their manes, and then around him at the hedgerows and the luminous blue of the upland skies.

The gypsies sang as they went, and the children beat their feet on the driving boards, shouting shrilly at the horses who plodded on, ignoring it all. The sunshine was good on one's hands. Faraon stretched his fingers out and tried to forget, listening to the groan and gather of the wheels and the stiff creaking of harness.

At midday, they stopped for food. Faraon sat in the grass at the roadside, his knees apart and his bread and cheese on the ground between them. Manfariel dropped down beside him, stretching.

" You and I and Reuben are stopping here for a bit," he said. Faraon stared at him, his mouth half open to take a bite.

" Why ? " he asked.

" Go on, boy, eat it," said Manfariel imperturbably. " Just what I say."

Faraon took his mouthful and chewed it hastily. " But why ? " he said again, as soon as he could manage a word.

" We shall rejoin the others some five miles on," went on Manfariel, lifting his eyebrows a little as he gazed up into the elm branches above him. Faraon cursed fluently.

" Are you going to tell me ? " he demanded.

" Why, boy, there's an impatience," said Reuben, coming up on his other side and grinning across at Manfariel who returned a broad wink. In his exasperation, Faraon knocked over his mug of tea and it soaked through his split right shoe. He swore worse than ever, and the two gypsies covered their ears in mock horror.

Micah came up before him. " Shut up, boy," he said, " and you two fools behave yourselves."

Reuben and Manfariel assumed looks of righteous indignation, but before they could say anything, Micah went on : " You and these other two are returning tonight to our last camp to get some property we left behind," he said. Faraon stared up at him, his eyes pleading, yet unsure. Micah grinned. " The black horse, boy," he said, " the black horse."

Faraon gasped, looked swiftly from him to the two grinning

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faces on either side of him, and back to Micah again. His eyes lit up so that Micah found himself grinning almost idiotically with pleasure at the joy he saw in them.

"Gosh!" said Faraon, and no more. They hit him on the back and roared with laughter. When he turned, all the gypsies were smiling. So they all knew! Who had suggested it? How had it happened? Micah told him. "We all want him back," he said, "it's not just for you, you young fool."

But Faraon grinned and hit him in the chest, and then bowled Manfariel over into the ditch and ran to his grandmother where she sat beaming on the top step of the caravan, his wet shoe squelching as he went. His thanks were a ribald insult, at which she only grinned the more; and the women, laughing, hustled him down on to the road again.

When the caravans lurched off, everyone wished the three young men luck and waved to them where they stood with their horses until they were out of sight.

As the shadows began to lengthen, the three gypsies rode back the way they had come. The line of the hills was of a startling dark clarity against the deepening curve of the sky. The first breeze of the night touched Faraon's temples, and the corners of his mouth twitched a little with nerves.

They met very few people, some children returning from the woods, an old man who watched them go by with unbelieving eyes, having some vague notion that they must be unearthly, and who went home convinced that he had seen either three devils or three angels who rode dark horses through the twilight. As it grew darker, a car passed them, its headlamps throwing their shadows before them along the grass verge and leaving its occupants with a momentary glimpse of the high-boned arrogance of the faces that turned to watch them pass. They reached the farm before the moon rose.

Leaving two of the horses at the end of the road in a copse, the three gypsies slunk down by the hedge, leading the third horse, with muffled hooves, along the grass. They paused by the gate and stared into the darkness, just lightening a little with the already moon-silvered upper air.

"He's still here," whispered Faraon, seeing the horse's shape at the far side of the field.

"All right, we'll just get near enough not to startle him too much, and then you call," whispered back Manfariel.

The horse watched them uneasily, moving sideways a little. Faraon called, as low as a whisper of the wind. The horse's ears came forward. He stiffened for a moment and then came, blowing

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excitedly, lifting his heels like a colt. Faraon caught and quieted him. Reuben unmuffled the hooves of the other horse and turned him loose, and immediately he began grazing.

"Good," breathed Manfariel, "no bother here. Now this one." They slipped the halter over his head, and Faraon led him towards the gate. The black followed eagerly.

"What about his hooves?" he whispered.

"Don't bother," whispered back Manfariel, "keep him on the grass. We must get away before the moon rises."

They reached the copse and all three mounted and set off up the lane, keeping to the grass and the side of the road. They had not gone a hundred yards when the moon swung into view above the hills, clear and honey-gold and untrammelled by any clouds. The stars suddenly seemed to take on a new depth of light, a new richness of setting. A white owl flew silently across the road.

The three gypsies rode at a steady pace, though the eagerness of the hooves beneath him made Faraon long to throw himself flat upon the broad, warm back and let the black horse go like the wind. But they had the morning's journey to do and another five miles on top of that. They could not tire the horses, who were unused to too much speed.

The gypsies were waiting as they rode in. Micah came up to them.

"Don't dismount," he said, "we're moving on, to make sure no one sees us leave. We'll go slow and camp again at mid-morning for the rest of the day. Follow behind, Faraon."

The caravans jolted slowly off, the mothers soothing the awakened children to sleep again. Their shadows followed them palely down the track, and only a stirring of wild creatures acknowledged their going. Faraon would have given anything to have been able to lift his head and howl his exultation to the stars. But he suddenly realized that he was very hungry and sleepy, like the black horse, and he leaned forward and patted the long nose and gently urged him up a little closer to the last caravan. He would be very glad when it was time for breakfast.

* * *

THE SWAN

Scholars call the masculine swan a cob;
I call him a narcissistic snob.
He looks in the mirror over and over,
And claims to have never heard of Pavlova.

OGDEN NASH

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NEVER START A RUMOUR

"Sometimes it's a gusher," he said, "sometimes a dry hole—and sometimes you get right down to bedrock!"

by DILLON ANDERSON

IT was on the Widow Wiley's farm north of Dallas that Claudie and I found ourselves about daylight one May morning, in great need of hospitality. Personally, I think well of faith, hope and charity, all three, but I believe I like hospitality better; it is more apt to stick to your ribs.

The Widow Wiley had not asked us there; she didn't know us; she didn't even know we were there. As I explained to Claudie, this was one of the small drawbacks of life in a caravan trailer if you don't have a car to pull it: you might be left stranded on strange premises any time. We had lost our free tow the night before when our right tyre went flat.

"Also," Claudie said, "we're low on food, we're right out of money, and we haven't got a spare tyre."

"Claudie," I said, "you only see the dark side of things. Suppose I hadn't arranged to have us pulled in here last night? Suppose I hadn't found out that this place belongs to the Widow Wiley? Suppose I hadn't learned that she has a tender heart?"

By this time it was broad daylight, and we could see that our caravan was parked in the middle of a willow grove a hundred steps or so from the house. A well of cool, sweet water wasn't more than ten steps away on one side, and there was a nice, quiet, new windmill to lift it for us. About the same distance in the other direction was the prettiest garden this side of Eden—mustard greens, tomatoes, onions, radishes, turnips, and several other kinds of growing garden produce.

Beyond the garden, a red barn was joined on to the cow pasture by a low green hedge, and between the barn and the house there was a big apple and peach orchard. The air was full of all the green, growing smells of good rich land in the spring.

"Here," I remarked to Claudie, "are the makings of real hospitality."

Claudie said, "We're probably going to like it here if the mosquitoes don't eat us up."

"Claudie," I said, "that's the trouble with you. All a big

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red apple means to you is that there might be a worm in it. Go get me a big spoonful of that sulphur in the green alum can and then take one yourself. Nothing will feed on a man that's got a little sulphur in his system."

The sun hadn't been up very long when we heard the screen door slam at the house. Then we saw her; not the Widow Wiley—she couldn't have been—but the girl who was to change the whole course of our lives, for the next day or so, anyway; and, since a man can live only one day of his life at a time, the next day or so was what counted.

I could tell that she had not seen us as she sauntered towards us through the orchard, carrying two milk pails, and whistling a song by the name of *Can't You Hear Me Callin', Caroline?* When she wasn't more than ten steps away, she looked up and saw us for the first time. She stopped in her tracks, dropped the milk pails, and broke off in the middle of a long high note.

I could see a lot of white around the blue in her wide open eyes, and she looked so sweet and pure and scared that I felt like a cocklebur growing in a bed of roses.

She couldn't have been over nineteen, and as she stood there in her plain, short sleeved, yellow dress, I thought that if the good Lord did this much for all the women in Texas it would close all the beauty parlours in the state and drive the cosmetic business to the wall. Her black hair looked as soft and smooth as a kitten's.

"Be quiet, Claudie," I whispered. "It will be all I can do to handle this myself."

As I took off my hat I said, "Good morning, Miss," and I was especially polite. "We are looking for the Widow Wiley."

Then I saw an older woman coming down the path behind Miss Peaches and Cream. She was shaped a good deal like the younger one, only in an older way. She came up and looked at us. There was no hospitality in her eyes.

"Who are you men?" she wanted to know. "And what is that thing down there in the grove?"

"Are you the Widow Wiley?" I asked.

"I am," she said, as if she were proud of it.

"My name is Clint Hightower, and this is Claudie Hughes," I explained. "He works for me. We live in that caravan down there in the grove, and we hope you will let us stay here until we can get a lift into Dallas. You must need some help on a big place like this. There's hardly anything we can't do."

"But I don't know what kind of people you are. You might be escaped convicts," she answered.

She went too far here; it was the opening I'd been sparring

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for. " Madam, you have hurt me, and you have hurt my friend Claudie. He is more sensitive than I am," I told her. " They shave convicts' heads, you know. Can't you see that we have plenty of hair ? " I turned to Claudie and told him to take off his hat. Neither one of us had had a haircut in some weeks.

" I don't want to hurt your feelings," she said. " I just want you to leave. My daughter Emma and I live here alone, and we are afraid of prowlers."

I turned and spoke to Claudie : " We have asked for bread, and she has given us a stone." Then I looked at the Widow Wiley and said, " We do not own a car to pull our caravan, but our hearts are pure."

Emma whispered something to the Widow Wiley, and when I looked back at the Widow she was shaking her head.

" Madam," I said, " would you ladies like some help with the milking ? "

In all my life I'd never seen anybody turn down help when it came to breaking a mule or milking a cow. " In fact," I went on, " we'll be glad to take over the milking this morning, and we hope you'll give us a bite of breakfast."

" All right," the Widow Wiley answered, as I took both milk pails from Emma and gave them to Claudie, " but be careful with the little Jersey. She's a kicker."

The Widow Wiley walked and Emma floated along beside her towards the house. As Claudie milked the cows, I cautioned him about Emma.

" Claudie," I said, " kindly do not get any ideas about that Emma. Be careful how you look at her." Then I went down to the caravan to shave and to change my shirt before breakfast.

When I and Claudie carried the milk up to the house, the cats met us at the back porch—four or five big yellow ones and a litter of mottled kittens. I gave them some milk in a pie dish, just so the Widow and Emma could see how kind we were to animals.

The Widow Wiley came out on the porch and strained the milk. Then they gave us breakfast at a table in the kitchen. As we ate, I praised the Widow's cows, her orchard, her cats, her cooking, and her hospitality; and after Emma went in to the front of the house to clean things up, the Widow got into a real talking mood herself. She was like a lot of people in Texas ; when they begin to like you, they'll share their food and their story with you right off. She told us about herself and about her folks, and I and Claudie listened as we ate. A lot of hospitality works out like that.

The Widow Wiley's people were among the earliest settlers in the county, she said. Her grandfather Elisha Corn had been a famous Indian fighter, and this was the place he had settled on.

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Her father, Elijah Corn, had put the whole farm into cultivation and it was from him that she inherited it before she married Clem Wiley. They had no children for several years after they were married; then their only daughter, Emma, had come along, and Clem died when Emma was a little thing in pigtails.

In the fifteen years since her husband's death, the Widow Wiley had got into debt nearly every year, she said. First it was the tombstone for Clem's grave. The next year the barn had burned with less than half as much insurance on it as the new one had cost. Then there had been a crop failure the year Emma finished high school, and things had gone from bad to worse ever since.

"If this place hadn't been a homestead, they'd have taken it long ago," the Widow Wiley said, with tears in her eyes. Claudie was so touched that he nearly stopped eating.

"Who do you owe all this money to?" I asked.

"I don't know his real name; he calls himself George Texas. He came to McKinney about ten years ago from somewhere in Southern Europe. He bought bones and rags around here for years, but he's a big man now."

"How much do you owe him?" Claudie asked. Claudie has no sense at all about what questions not to ask. But this didn't seem to bother the Widow Wiley.

"Fifteen hundred dollars," she said.

"And interest?" I asked her.

"No, that includes interest," she stated, as she got up and started clearing the dishes away.

After breakfast I told the Widow that I could see a number of things around the place that needed a man's touch. I explained that I would be glad to have Claudie fix these things up under my supervision.

While I sat in the rocking chair on the front porch, Claudie got busy. He knocked some dents out of the Widow's coal scuttle, fixed a broken hinge on the cellar door, nailed up some loose planks on the verandah, and doctored a rooster that had the limber-neck.

About eleven o'clock Emma came out on the front porch with a little kitten in her arms. I got up and offered her my chair, but she blushed and said no, she would sit on the step. I noticed she had changed dresses. She sat there stroking the kitten and looking out towards the front gate where Claudie was working on the latch. When he saw her, he started hammering away twice as fast.

"Does Claudie have to do all the work?" she asked, without smiling.

"He works with his hands," I told her. "I do the thinking."

"Do you just think up things for him to do?"

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" Emma," I said, " you don't do me justice," but I was afraid, as I said it, that she did.

When the Widow Wiley came out around midday with some ham sandwiches, apple pie, and cider, I told her I believed her problem was right in my line.

" What is your line, Mr. Hightower ? " the Widow asked. Emma was standing by the front door listening.

" There is hardly anything that is not in my line," I told her. " Hardly anything, that is, except I have always steered strictly clear of politics, smuggling, and all kinds of manual labour. A man can usually avoid these things, madam, and still find plenty of leeway for his natural gifts. It is only when he does the same thing over and over that his talents begin to wither and his spirits to fester."

" The Lord would bless you if you helped me get out of debt," she said. It sounded genuine, like something my grandmother used to read me from the Bible when I was little.

" Madam," I went on, " how much land do you have here ? "

" A hundred and sixty acres," she answered.

" Have you ever leased it for oil ? " As I asked her this question, I glanced at Claudie and saw he was hard hit with the size of my idea ; he was batting his eyes like a bullfrog in a hailstorm.

" Never did," the Widow said. " Twelve or fifteen years ago they drilled a mile or so south of here and got everybody all excited—but they only struck granite. They said then that the whole west part of the country was condemned for oil."

" Mrs. Wiley," I said, " excuse me, but how long ago did you say George Texas came to McKinney ? "

" About ten years ago," she said. " Why ? "

" I just wondered," I told her ; then I turned to Claudie and said, " Run down to the caravan, Claudie, and get me the blank oil and gas lease we found in that filling station in Fort Worth. It's in my raincoat pocket."

While he was gone, I sat there alone on the porch and thought a lot more. When Claudie came back with the paper, I went into the kitchen where the Widow Wiley was churning while Emma put the dishes away. I asked the Widow how much she wanted for an oil and gas lease on her place.

" I can't take any money," she said. " We don't have oil and gas. I tell you, it's granite underneath." This made me really proud of the Widow ; she would not take advantage of us.

" Honesty is the best policy," I told her and nodded at Emma. " But look, Mrs. Wiley, you don't have to take any money from us. If you'll sign the lease, I'll try to sell it for you. Then you wouldn't be doing anything wrong."

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" Would that be fair ? " Emma asked me, but I could see that the Widow had a tempted look in her eyes.

" It would be fair if somebody didn't believe what they said about granite," I argued. " Did anybody see the granite ? Another thing, they didn't strike granite on this place, did they ? "

" No, you're right there," the Widow said and paused ; then, " I'll have to think it over. It seems almost deceitful."

" Madam," I said, " my time is pretty valuable. We may have to leave any day. Sign this lease, and we'll split with you whatever we sell it for."

You don't often get a woman convinced with pure reason, but the Widow Wiley was no ordinary woman, and this last point shook her. She took Emma into the next room for a few minutes, and when they came back they had on their bonnets.

Claudie and I, and the Widow Wiley and Emma drove down the road in the Widow's old car to the office of the Justice of the Peace. I made the lease out to me, and when the Widow had signed it, the Justice put his acknowledgment on it free.

The next day Claudie milked the cows and gathered enough vegetables before breakfast to fill the back seat of the Wiley car. Emma and the Widow agreed for us to take them to the market in McKinney, and I explained that we would look into the oil business some more while we were in town.

Just as we were driving out of the front gate, I stopped and said, " Claudie, you had better run back to the caravan and get our cash—I mean the money you've got in your overcoat lining."

" There ain't but four dollars and a half left, and you always said it was for a rainy day," Claudie argued.

" It is for a rainy day," I told him. " A lot of people have the wrong idea about rainy days. Did you never hear of the manna that rained on the Israelites, Claudie ? Now hurry along." He went.

As we drove across the Wilson Creek bridge on the McKinney road, Claudie spoke up. I knew it was going to be about the money, since Claudie had been quiet for twenty minutes, trying to think of how to bring up such a delicate subject. " What are we going to do with the money, Clint ? "

" Well," I explained, " we've got to put that oil and gas lease on the County Records, for one thing. That will cost us about a dollar, I expect."

Claudie dug out a dollar and handed it to me. I didn't much mind his being so close about the money, because it was his part of what he had made on our last job in Fort Worth, anyhow.

" Then," I went on, " there is the matter of revenue stamps. You probably never heard of them, did you ? "

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"Not except on shop bought whisky."

"Well," I explained, "for every thousand dollars that you pay for land, the law says you've got to put at least a dollar's worth of revenue stamps on the deed."

"Who told you that?" Claudie wanted to know.

"Claudie," I answered, "you have to depend on me for a number of things. It just happens that one of the contacts I made in Fort Worth last year was a notary. He was a very smart man. He told me about stamps for a part of what you pay for deeds. It's the same for oil and gas leases."

"Well," said Claudie, "we didn't pay nothing for the lease, so we don't have to buy no stamps."

"That's where you are wrong, Claudie. It says that you have to put on *at least* a dollar's worth for each thousand dollars you pay. The law don't limit a man on how many stamps he can buy. You can put on as many more as you want to. Also, it helps support the government. I think I'll buy about two dollars' worth."

Claudie handed me the two dollars. Then I asked him for another dollar to take care of miscellaneous expenses. This was the hardest part to explain, as it often is with miscellaneous expenses.

In McKinney I went to the Post Office and bought two dollars' worth of stamps. I put them on the lease and cancelled them with my initials just like the man said at the revenue window. Then I went over to the County Clerk's office on the second floor of the Court House, where they record papers. All this time Claudie was down at the wagon yard selling the vegetables.

The girl on duty in the Clerk's office was standing over by a window at the far end of the counter. She was laughing and rolling her big brown eyes at three overgrown young fellows who were standing around smoking cigarettes and shoving each other every time anything was said—the same way boys of that age always act around a girl in the spring if they don't have any work to do.

I waited a few minutes, trying to catch the brunette's eye, and finally I said in a loud voice: "I want to record an oil and gas lease on the Widow Wiley's farm over in the west side of the county. Who attends to that?"

The girl looked up and said, "I do." Then I went over and handed her the lease, holding it topside up where the signature, the acknowledgment, and the revenue stamps would all show. Her friends at first pretended not to be looking over my shoulder, but this did not last, and after a few minutes we were all looking at the lease together. After they'd had plenty of time to look it over, I paid a dollar to the girl and went out. The boys left, too, talking together a lot faster than they had talked to the girl.

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When I left the Court House, I walked over to the barbershop on the south side of the square to get a shave. There were several customers there, but the last chair in the back was unoccupied. A barber with a long, keen nose and glassy eyes took me. When he had a hot towel all over my face, except for a little island around my nose, he said in a half whisper: "You're the fellow who recorded the lease, ain't you?"

"Ummhumm," I told him through the towel.

"Which one of the oil companies are you leasing for?" he asked me after a few minutes.

I didn't answer him right away, since the razor was working very close between my lips and my nose, and he asked me again.

"I didn't even say I was leasing for a company," I told him.

"You don't have to," the barber said. "Nobody but the major companies pay prices like that."

"You must know," I said.

Then he asked me again, "Which company is it?"

"I don't think it is standard practice to tell, is it?" I didn't ask it in a way that called for an answer. I just let it soak in. When it did, he dropped his razor to the floor; then, after he picked it up, he put the towel back over my face. But I could see out, and I watched him go up and start whispering to the boss.

I paid for my shave, and while the porter was brushing me off, the glassy eyed barber came over to me. I tipped him a dime and he said, "I hope you all strike a gusher."

"Well," I told him, "sometimes it's a gusher, sometimes a dry hole. It's all in the day's work."

As I stepped out to the street, feeling with my hand how smooth a barbershop shave makes a man's chin feel, I met Claudie, and he was really in a dither. "Oil," he said, between deep breaths, "Standard Oil—Standard Oil Company on the Widow Wiley's place. Everybody is talking oil. Have you heard anything about it, Clint?"

"That's a hell of a question to be asking a man as he comes out of a barbershop," I said. "Gather yourself together, Claudie; you're pretty excited. Go on back to the car and wait for me there. Just act serious and mysterious if you can; don't say nothing to nobody."

I walked round the square and passed a lot of people on the pavement. They were gathering in little knots, and they talked and nodded at each other much faster than was natural. They'd be looking away from me as I walked towards them, but as soon as I passed, I'd turn and look and they'd all be staring at me. Some folks will tell you that nothing in the world ferments like hops

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and malt, but they don't know a thing about an oil scare in Texas.

I kept on going until I reached the big store with the red front where a sign, spread right across the entrance, read : *George Texas—Hardware, Stationery and Loans.*

I went in and saw that there were no other customers around. People were all out on the streets talking about oil. A tall, pale, stringy haired fellow with a big Adam's apple was standing at the cash desk. As I looked over the counter, he said, " Was there something for you ? "

" Yes," I said, " I'll just look around here until I find it."

About this time I saw a big man get up from his desk in the rear and come forward. He walked like a man would walk in his own store. That would be George Texas, I said to myself as I studied his heavy face and baggy eyes. I noticed that his hair grew down close to his eyebrows, and his chin was blue like a man's chin is when he has just come from a barbershop.

" Otto," the man with the blue chin said to the cashier, " you can go back to your inventory ; I'll wait on Mr. Hightower." Then he turned and said that he was George Texas, the proprietor of the store. I could tell from the hungry look on his well fed face that there wasn't anything the barber knew that George Texas didn't know, too. I nodded to him ; then I kept on looking around until I came to a stop by the counter with pencils, rubbers, and fountain pens on it. There wasn't a thing in sight that sold for an even sum of money. Everything was nine cents, or ninety eight cents, or a dollar nineteen, and so on.

" What is the price," I asked George Texas, " of the best fountain pen in the house ? "

" Here you are," he answered, as he handed me one with a gold-looking point and smiled at me like you've seen people smile at rich old relatives. " They are ninety eight cents."

I tried the fountain pen out on an envelope he handed me and it worked all right. While I was doing this I said out loud to myself, " In my business, people have to sign their names in ink." Then I turned to him and said, " I'll take it," and I handed him the last one of Claudie's dollar bills—the one for miscellaneous expenses. " Just keep the change," I told him.

When I took the fountain pen and started to walk out, George Texas followed me to the door. He wanted to give me a bottle of blue ink to go with it, and I let him. Just as I was pushing the store door open to leave, he said in a low, confidential tone of voice, " Can you step back into my office with me ? "

" Sorry," I told him, " but I've got a lot of things to do. Let's have it right here."

He looked towards Otto, who was going through some motions

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with his hands while his eyes were on us; then George Texas said in a hoarse whisper: "Will you take twenty two hundred dollars for the Wiley lease?"

"That won't touch it, Mr. Texas," I said, but I stood right at the door and added: "Besides, I'm afraid it wouldn't be right."

"Course it would," he argued. "It's in your name, ain't it?"

"Yes," I said, "it's in my name all right."

"Twenty three hundred?" He said it like an auctioneer says it just before he says "*Gone!*"

Then I let him have it. "I said it wouldn't be right if I sold it," I told him, and I looked at him in the way I always felt Moses must have looked at Aaron when he came down from the mountain and caught him on his knees before the golden calf. But I didn't quite get out of the door.

"All right," George Texas said and turned away.

"Tell you what I'll do," I said, and wheeled as I let the door close again. "I'll take twenty five hundred dollars in cash, but I can't fool around about time. Time is important to me."

"You've sold it." George Texas almost snapped it out. He went back to a big black safe by his desk and got out a brown envelope. He counted twenty five hundred dollars in tens and twenties, and we went straight over to the Court House, where we had to push our way through the crowd in front of the store. I put my name on an assignment and acknowledged it before the Clerk; then George Texas said he was going to record it. "Oh no," I said, "not until you have put the revenue stamps on it. That will cost you two dollars and a half. I'll go with you to the Post Office, where they sell them."

We went over and got the stamps, and I showed George Texas how to cancel them with his initials; then we went back and got the girl with big brown eyes to record the paper.

After George Texas paid his dollar for the registration, I turned to him and said, "Now let's have the Widow Wiley's note—it's fifteen hundred dollars, I believe." Back to the store we went, and up to the big black safe, but right there George baulked on me.

"Hold it," he said. "Just a minute; this is too fast for me."

"Fast, huh?" I answered. "Is there anything wrong with this money? If it ain't legal tender, you're in a hell of a pickle, George Texas." I knew all about legal tender from that smart notary in Fort Worth.

George said that the money was good, all right but he was not sure what was happening to him.

"I'm paying off the Widow Wiley's note" I said, "and I want you to mark *Paid in full* on it—now. I am tendering you the money."

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That did it. As George Texas got the note out, he rolled his eyes like a sucking calf does when he is pulled away from the cow by his ears. I held fifteen hundred dollars' worth of the money in my hand until he wrote *Paid in full* on the back of the note and gave it to me. Then I went over to the car, where Claudie was waiting for me.

" Claudie," I said, " you and I are about due for a nice cold drink. Let's go into the snack bar across the street."

While I had an egg malted milk and Claudie had a banana split with cherries, I told him about our trade. I even told him how all the oil excitement got started, and he seemed to understand it pretty well. I showed him the Widow Wiley's cancelled note, and Claudie seemed so stunned by it all that he had very little to say as he gnawed away on the banana split.

" What the hell's wrong with you, Claudie ? " I finally asked him. " Aren't you glad for the Widow Wiley ? Aren't you glad about our thousand dollars ? What do you think about it all ? "

" I was just thinking," Claudie said through a sliver of banana he was scooping in, " how silly we'd feel if they ever struck oil on the Widow Wiley's place. George Texas would be the one to get rich."

" There you go again, Claudie," I said. " Still looking for a worm in every apple."

By this time a large number of other people had come to the soda fountain ; they were gawking at us, and talking.

" Let's get the hell out of here, Claudie," I said. " I'll go back over to George Texas' place and trade him this blue ink for some that's green. You take this cancelled note and hold on to it. I'll see you at the car after a little bit."

We were over halfway back to the Widow Wiley's farm when Claudie spoke up. " Clint," he said, " there ain't anything we need worse than a car to pull our caravan, is there ? "

" I don't know, Claudie," I said. " A car is a lot of expense. If we had a car, we'd have six tyres to go flat instead of just the two that we've got on the caravan."

" I'm the one that fixes the tyres," Claudie said. " I wouldn't mind."

" Claudie," I told him, " don't it make you happy when you think of how relieved the Widow Wiley is going to be when we give back her note, marked *Paid in full ?* She's out of debt."

" Sure does," Claudie answered, " but not as happy as a new car would make me."

" Haven't you got any sentiment at all, Claudie ? " I said.

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" Course I have, Clint," Claudie told me. " But it's pretty hard, and it's gittin' harder, to hitchhike with a caravan."

" You must not be thinking of how much it costs to get the valves ground on a car. That's awful expensive," I told him.

" I believe I could grind the valves if we had a car," Claudie said. " Let's take that thousand dollars and buy us a car tomorrow."

" Claudie," I said, " there is something I have to tell you about that thousand dollars. We don't exactly have it any more."

" We don't what ? " Claudie asked, and he looked a little chalky around the gills.

" You see, it's this way," I explained. " We bought back a part interest in that lease from George Texas when I went back to swap him the blue ink for green."

" How much did we pay him ? "

" Nine hundred and eighty nine dollars," I told him. " George Texas is a sucker for an uneven sum of money."

After a bit, Claudie said : " I can't figure how we've got eleven dollars left." His jaw was sagging like a gate with a broken hinge.

" Right," I told him, " and here it is. Put it back in your overcoat lining." I handed him a ten and a one.

" What part of the lease did you buy back ? " Claudie asked.

" Well," I said, " George Texas is a hard trader. At first he didn't want to give up any part of it. I finally got a one per cent interest—a full one per cent."

Claudie looked all worn out. It was too much for him to try to understand percentages, so I said, " Buck up, Claudie. Try to look at the bright side of things. You've got more money for a rainy day. The Widow Wiley is not in debt any more, the government is over four dollars better off, and we are not in any trouble. Nobody is hurt—not even George Texas. We didn't do anything to him that he didn't do to us—and then some."

" Looks like everybody got something out of that deal but you, Clint," he said. " What do you want ? "

" Well," I told him, " before we leave the Widow Wiley's, I might want to show Emma the Widow's note marked *Paid in full.*"

* * *

THERE'S A LONG, LONG TRAIL . . .

" *The Ministry's stand at the British Food Fair is entitled ' The Egg and You.' It illustrates the odyssey of the egg from the hen to the breakfast table . . .*" reads a note in a Ministry of Food Bulletin.

Just so. The Odyssey took twenty years !

PETERBOROUGH, *in The Daily Telegraph*

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VINO ARDOROSO

"The bouquet is rare, monsieur," she said, "delicate, like a rose"

by J. MATTHEWMAN

"IT'S just a lot of malarkey. Love potions, pah!" said Grindlay, biting the end off his cigar and sticking the butt belligerently into his mouth.

I grinned. "It's obvious you've never tasted a *Vino Ardoroso*," I told him.

Now, it's a well known fact that Grindlay considers himself something of a connoisseur on wines and women—beautiful women, that is. "Look for one—and you'll find the other," he would say, which was the reason why we were sitting on the verandah of Signora Pèlotti's Hotel in Bombay, waiting for the bearer to bring us a drink.

Grindlay had discovered that Rose Cheviot, a renowned beauty, was travelling home on the same ship as himself. He scanned the visitors' book in the hotel foyer, found I was a newspaper reporter, picked up a speaking acquaintance and persuaded me to arrange an introduction to her.

"But—why me?" I had asked, curiously.

"Well, a famous beauty leaving India for good—you're a newspaper reporter, aren't you? Usually find you fellows poking your nose into everything."

I was ruffled by his remark and at the same time curious to see the effect Rose's beauty would have on this notorious hedonist, and so, here we were, waiting for Miss Cheviot to join us when she had finished her packing.

Grindlay paused with a lighted match in his hand.

"*Vino Ardoroso*? Never heard of it. Probably some filthy concoction mixed up in a squalid little back alley off the Rue Nègre."

"On the contrary," I said, as Grindlay disappeared behind clouds of blue smoke. "It is the most delectable drink I have ever tasted and it was composed in a garden of unimaginable beauty, beneath a quite incredible moon, by a young woman of even more astounding beauty than Rose Cheviot's."

"Ridiculous. Poppycock. And anyway, I told you, I don't believe in those things. Love potions, indeed!"

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" You'd better," I said, " Rose Cheviot does." He was quiet as I began the story, but I could feel his unspoken scorn.

" I was travelling through Italy in '46 and happened to stay in a tiny hill village, somewhere in Tuscany. After the hectic war years, newspaper reporting had gone suddenly flat on me. I was completely broke and very bored.

" I stopped an old man and asked if he knew of a good wine shop in the village. ' *Si, Signore,* the Villa Francesca,' he said eagerly. I could hear the bystanders laugh. ' Pay no attention,' one of them called to me, ' it is only old Perro,' and he tapped his head significantly.

" I thought I detected a certain embarrassment in their voices and scenting a story, pressed for details. ' But there is nothing, *Signore,*' they assured me, ' only an old Villa falling to pieces up there on the mountain and a virago of a caretaker. Some say she is a witch and makes spells and curses ; you know the way people talk.'

" I saw the old man dart a look of venom at them and when they had walked on, I caught him up. ' Old man,' I asked him, ' is it true, about the spells and curses, I mean ? '

" He shrugged. ' I said nothing of such things, *Signore.* You asked for a place to drink.'

" ' So I did. Well then, this Villa Francesca, is it an hotel, a wine shop, a café perhaps ? '

" He shook his head. ' Just a Villa, *Signore.*' He seemed reluctant to help me now. ' You will find plenty of wine in the village.'

" I followed him up the rough, stony track to the edge of the wood on the crown of the hill, more determined than ever to pursue the subject of the mysterious Villa and its curious châtelaine.

" ' What made you think of telling me about it ? ' I asked as he paused for breath. ' Is the Signora's wine so potent, then ? '

" ' It is the most wonderful wine in the world,' he said simply."

I could feel Grindlay stirring a little as my story unfolded.

" ' I am the gardener at the Villa Francesca,' the old man said. ' In the old days when the Duchesa lived here, there were many of us, but now, the Duchesa and all her family are gone and I am the only one left. I and Maria, the caretaker.' We had climbed so high we could look down on the village nestling in the valley, with the lights beginning to twinkle out, one by one. Above us, the moon threw elongated shadows over the pattern of cultivated fields. Old Perro drew a circle with his arm. ' In the old days all this belonged to the Francescas. They were rich and prosperous and well liked by the local people, all of whom knew about the famous Francesca legend.' "

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Grindlay snorted. " Same old story," he said, " I've heard it a dozen times." I ignored him and went on.

" Well the tale goes that the Duchesa acquired the secret from the Duc, who had taken it from a Turk with whom he'd had some nefarious dealings. The Duchesa tried the potion—and it worked. Stories began to leak out concerning the Duchesa's many lovers, of the Duc's *amours* in foreign parts, of the successful wooing and winning of the young Francesca's three rich husbands. Whatever the truth about the potion, the Francesca family certainly enjoyed a reputation for acquiring lovers, male and female."

" Probably a lot of Borgias poisoning off their unfortunate rivals," grunted Grindlay.

I beckoned to the bearer. " Ask Signora Pèlotti if we may have a bottle of her special wine, the one she reserves for—old friends."

Grindlay roused himself immediately. Purple in the face, he stretched an accusing finger across the table.

" What's that you say ? Special wine ? Why haven't I had a bottle ? Why I'm practically the oldest, certainly the best customer here. It's scandalous, preposterous ! I shall speak to Pèlotti about it."

" Do, she'll be vastly flattered," I replied coolly. " Well, as I said, while Perro was telling me all this, we had reached the Villa, a dilapidated old ruin, fighting a losing battle against the forest and the creepers. It looked eerie in the moonlight. Forsaken, haunted by memories.

" Perro, guessing my thoughts, pointed towards a high wall screening the back of the house and garden. ' I do a little work in there. I am an old man, I cannot deal with it all now.' He led me up to a little iron door hidden behind a curtain of hanging wistaria and pulled an old fashioned bell.

" The soft notes echoing through the crumbling rooms were like drops of clear sound rippling the pool of the past. Footsteps shuffled towards us on the inside. ' Ask for the *Vino Ardoroso, Signore*,' Perro whispered in my ears. ' Maria is the last person alive to learn the secret of the love potion. You will not regret it, *Signore*, your visit to the Villa Francesca.' Before I could stop him, he had shuffled away leaving me to face the mysterious caretaker—alone."

" No need to finish it," Grindlay interposed. " They enticed you in, gave you a glass of drugged wine and when you recovered consciousness your pockets had been rifled and all your money and papers had gone." Grindlay paused, triumphant.

" I don't think I'll tell you the rest. You don't deserve it. Why you've practically called me a liar already."

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" Well, you really don't expect a man of intelligence to swallow all that stuff about love potions, now do you ? "

" I'm only telling you what actually happened. You can make up your own mind as to the cause or effect."

" Go on, then. Maria opened the door to you—"

I smiled. I had him curious, at least.

" She seemed, somehow, to expect me. Hunched, wizened, older even than Perro, she was like part of the disintegrating walls, a grey obscurity. I followed her down a dark corridor, the shadows leaping and receding before the trembling flame of her candle, and into the old banqueting hall, a long, low room inhabited by an oppressive void that crowded upon one's person and shrieked its silence against the naked walls.

" A curious vault-like coldness invaded the place as if someone had opened the door to a crypt. It smelt dank, rotten, and evil.

" Maria set the candle on the only piece of furniture in the room, a low, refectory table. ' I will fetch a glass,' she muttered, before I had even spoken, and shuffled away into the darkness like a blind person, feeling her way.

" I looked about me. In the ghostly shadows cast by the guttering candle I could see the spaces on the wall where the portraits of those dead and buried Francescas had once looked down upon the scene of their mysterious orgies and the spirits of those other lovers pressed insidiously upon me, warning perhaps. Was I being a fool ? After all, I didn't know the old woman, or Perro either, for that matter. They might both be mad as hatters.

" I jumped as Maria spoke from behind me. Her pale face above the dark coarseness of her skirt, floated before my eyes like a disembodied ghost.

" ' We have not had a request for the *Ardoroso* for some time. Sit here, *Signore*, while I pour you a glass.' She placed a tall, delicate glass of exquisite Venetian design on the table before me. A pair of lovers' heads were subtly woven into the intricate pattern of grapevine and monogram.

" As the moment drew near, my throat contracted. I was stupidly, childishly afraid. I was free to go and yet—the appalling fascination of the place kept me chained to the spot. Maria uncorked a small, bulbous bottle with a slender neck, the whole encased in a plaited basket. ' Drink slowly, *Signore*. The bouquet is rare, but delicate, like a rose.' Then—holding the bottle carefully, reverently, she started to fill the glass.

" The wine was red, like the colour of blood. I stared at it, fascinated, and to my terror-stricken mind the colour seemed to change, to amber—gold—green. It twisted in the glass like a living

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thing, wreathed about the lovers' heads like a tortured flame. At last it was still, and, to my surprise, quite colourless.

" Maria's urgent voice broke in upon my stupor. ' *Now, Signore.*' With a cold fear gnawing at my heart, I reached out my hand for the glass.

" It felt cool and light between my feverish fingers. I hesitated. ' I have not enquired the price. Such a rare wine, perhaps —'

" ' There is no charge, *Signore.* You are not afraid to drink ? ' My laugh sounded hollow in my ears, and with her strange, compelling eyes urging me on, I put the glass to my lips and drank."

Grindlay was silent, his cigar making rings of smoke that spiralled away above our heads.

" Could you describe the flavour of a certain cognac, a rare liqueur, a brandy ? I can think of no words to recall the peculiar, bitter sweet fragrance of that *Vino Ardoroso.* When I had drained the glass I put it on the table and my expression must have evinced my disappointment. So far, there had been no unpleasant effects, no unusual sensations.

" ' It is a delightful wine, *Signora,* many thanks.' Maria shuffled to the back door and opened it a little way so that a single shaft of moonlight struck the white tiles. ' It takes a little while for the thing to work. Perhaps the *Signore* would care to walk in the garden while he waits ? '

" Fear returned to my limbs and heart. It was true, then, the wine was drugged. I stumbled clumsily to the door and fell into the garden.

" The singular serenity of that lovely spot quietened my throbbing nerves. Here was beauty and tranquility and peace. The moonlight flooding the marble terrace and the tiny rose arbour was almost warm after the deathly atmosphere within. I stooped to breathe in the familiar scent of a syringa bush when the first wave of emotion smote my senses.

" Again, words fail me. How shall I describe the strange, terrible, wonderful sensation that obsessed my mind and body. I was Samson demolishing the Temple. I was Atlas, holding up the world. I was two feet taller, and two stones heavier. The hot blood coursed through my veins and filled me with the mad desire to inhabit the bodies of those forgotten and departed lovers whose spirits haunted the Villa Francesca.

" When the storm within me abated, I felt weak and shaken, but instead of a disgusting nausea, an incredible peace seemed to invade my body. My mind, crystal clear, was filled with light. I could still see the garden in all its moonlit beauty, the flowers hanging like waxen models in the still air. As the pleasant listlessness

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crept into my limbs, I sank on to a garden seat and then—suddenly —I caught sight of her, standing quite still, as if she had been wafted there by the stroke of a magic wand.

" ' It works, the *Ardoroso* ? ' she enquired, her voice delightfully musical and low.

" ' It has—now,' I managed to mutter.

" She was—incredibly beautiful, not cold and remote and terrifying like Maria, but warm and vibrant and desirable. ' I am Maria's niece. I help her to make the wine. It is a complicated process.'

" Her words reached me through a haze of happiness. I have been drunk many times in my life, but never anything like that. We were alone together, the girl and I, alone in a garden of dangerous memories. Without moving a step I was drowning in the honeyed pool of her voice. My mind struggled against the compelling attraction of her dark eyes—and surrendered.

" Let them rob me of all I possessed, old Perro and Maria and her bewitching niece. I had never been so completely happy, never cared less what became of me."

Grindlay's cigar had gone out. He pulled his matches roughly from his pocket.

" So now you're going to tell me that you carried her off and married her. Well, serve you right. In a few years' time you'll need a love potion. I've seen those Latin women and I know. They all run to fat. Double chins and nagging natures. And no amount of love potion can save you from that."

As he spoke Signora Pèlotti appeared with a bottle of her wine reserved for special customers. She sank into a cane chair and fanned her florid face with a beringed hand.

" Ah, this terrible heat ! It will be the death of me. Your wine, *Signore*, I brought it myself. The servants do not treat with respect, you understand."

She winked broadly and her fat body shook with suppressed laughter.

" But here comes the Signora Cheviot, at last. What beauty, *Signores*, what grace."

Grindlay jumped smartly to his feet as Rose Cheviot came on to the verandah and approached our table.

" Ye gods ! " he breathed. " For once rumour didn't lie. She's superb."

I poured out four glasses of the Signora's wine and grinned at Rose.

" May I present Mr. Grindlay, my dear. My wife, sir."

" But—but I don't understand. You said—"

" I told you, we both believe in love potions, don't we, darling ?

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Sometimes, of course, they are a little tardy in effect."

Rose smiled sweetly. "I met Johnny shortly after he came back from the Villa Francesca. We fell in love at first sight. It's a unique story, Mr. Grindlay; you must get Johnny to tell you some time."

"But—the girl in the garden, Maria's niece—"

Signora Pèlotti's ample proportions creased with laughter.

"You said yourself, *Signore*, we Latins all run to fat."

* * *

NIGHTINGALES

Beautiful must be the mountains whence ye come,
And bright in the fruitful valleys the streams, wherefrom
Ye learn your song:
Where are those starry woods? O might I wander there,
Among the flowers, which in that heavenly air
Bloom the year long!

Nay, barren are those mountains and spent the streams:
Our song is the voice of desire, that haunts our dreams,
A throe of the heart,
Whose pining visions dim, forbidden hopes profound,
No dying cadence nor long sigh can sound,
For all our art.

Alone, aloud in the raptured ear of men
We pour our dark nocturnal secret; and then,
As night is withdrawn
From these sweet-springing meads and bursting boughs of May,
Dream, while the innumerable choir of day
Welcome the dawn.

ROBERT BRIDGES

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HOOK, LINE AND SINKER

There are better—and curiouser!—fish in the sea . . .

" Fishes pine away for love and wax lean," if Gomesius' authority may be taken, and are rampant too, some of them . . .

ROBERT BURTON, 1577–1640, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*

Invocation

You strange, astonished-looking, angle-faced,
Dreary-mouthed, gaping wretches of the sea,
Gulping salt-water everlastingly . . .
Legless, unloving, infamously chaste :—
O scaly, slippery, wet, swift, staring wights,
What is't ye do? What life lead? eh, dull goggles?
How do ye vary your vile days and nights?
How pass your Sundays? Are ye still but joggles
In ceaseless wash? Still nought but gapes, and bites,
And drinks, and stares, diversified with boggles?

LEIGH HUNT, 1784–1859, *The Fish, the Man, and the Spirit*

No Time To Be Lost

I was once in great danger of being lost in a most singular manner in the Mediterranean: I was bathing in that pleasant sea near Marseilles one summer's afternoon, when I discovered a very large fish, with his jaws quite extended, approaching me with the greatest velocity; there was no time to be lost, nor could I possibly avoid him.

I immediately reduced myself to as small a size as possible, by closing my feet and placing my hands also near my sides, in which position I passed directly between his jaws, and into his stomach, where I remained some time in total darkness, and comfortably warm, as you may imagine; at last it occurred to me, that by giving him pain he would be glad to get rid of me: as I had plenty of room, I played my pranks, such as tumbling, hop, step, and jump, &c., but nothing seemed to disturb him so much as the quick motion of my feet in attempting to dance a hornpipe; soon after I began he put me out, by sudden fits and starts . . .

At last he roared horridly, and stood up almost perpendicular in the water, with his head and shoulders exposed, by which he was discovered by the people on board an Italian trader, then sailing by, who harpooned him in a few minutes.

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As soon as he was brought on board, I heard the crew consulting how they should cut him up, so as to preserve the greatest quantity of oil. As I understood Italian, I was in most dreadful apprehensions lest their weapons employed in this business should destroy me also.

As soon as I perceived a glimmering of light I called out lustily to be released from a situation in which I was now almost suffocated. It is impossible for me to do justice to the degree and kind of astonishment which sat upon every countenance at hearing a human voice issue from a fish, but more so at seeing a naked man walk upright out of his body: in short, gentlemen, I told them the whole story, as I have done you, whilst amazement struck them dumb.

After taking some refreshment, and jumping into the sea to cleanse myself, I swam to my clothes, which lay where I had left them on the shore.

Singular Travels, Campaigns and Adventures of
BARON MUNCHAUSEN, 1720–1797

Spiv

A slim young pike, with smart fins
And grey-striped suit, a young cub of a pike
Slouching along away below, half out of sight,
Like a lout on an obscure pavement . . .

D. H. LAWRENCE, 1885–1930

The White Whale

" Moby Dick ? " shouted Ahab. " Do ye know the white whale then, Tash ? "

" Does he fan-tail a little curious, sir, before he goes down ? " said the Gay-Header deliberately.

" And has he a curious spout, too," said Daggoo, " very bushy, even for a parmacetty, and mighty quick, Captain Ahab ? "

" And he have one, two, tree—oh ! good many iron in him hide, too, Captain," cried Queequeg disjointedly, " all twisktee be-twisk, like him—him—" faltering hard for a word, and screwing his hand round and round as though uncorking a bottle—" like him—him—"

" Corkscrew ! " cried Ahab; " ay, Queequeg, the harpoons lie all twisted and wrenched in him; ay, Daggoo, his spout is a big one, like a whole shock of wheat, and white as a pile of our Nantucket wool after the great annual sheep-shearing; aye, Tashtego, and he fan-tails like a split jib in a squall. Death and devils ! men, it is Moby Dick ye have seen—Moby Dick—Moby Dick ! "

HERMAN MELVILLE, 1819-1891, *Moby Dick*

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Sea Horses

" There was a man in this island watched his field one night where he thought his neighbour's cattle were eating his grass, and what he saw was horses and foals coming out of the sea. And he caught a foal, and kept it, and set it racing, and no horse or pony could ever come near it for speed, till one day the race was on the sands, and away it went into the sea, and the jockey with it, and they were never seen again."

Told by a Connemara woman to Lady Gregory

Royal Entrance

Neptune sate in his Chariot High
Drawn by Six Hippopotami . . .

THOMAS HEYRICK, *The Submarine Voyage*, 1691

Furthermore

" Ever see'd a snake swim, George ? " The speaker was a big cheery-faced carter . . . " I see'd one Thursday."

" A wot ? A snake swimmin' ? "

" Yus. A snake swimmin'."

" Wot time o' day was that, Bill ? I reckon soon arter closin' time."

" It warn't arter closin' time. It wur just afore openin' time. Thursday evenin'. On the Cherwell it was. 'E swims across with 'is 'ead stuck up out of the water like the perryscope on a submarine. 'Is body was straight as that stick in your 'and, but 'is tail was flappin' like a fish."

" You should see the sea-snakes in Australia," said the landlord, a retired sailor. " Black as a crow on the back and yellow as a lemon on the belly, and venemous, Gawd bless my soul ! Compared with one of them, a boa constrictor is a garden pet."

" 'E allus goes one better nor we, don't 'e," said George.

" I've seen one of the yellow ones," I said. " He was stranded on an island in the Pacific, after a storm."

" Did he have a spotted tail ? " asked the landlord.

" He did," I agreed.

" Now who's tellin' lies ? " asked the old sailor proudly.

" I'll tell you somethin' queerer nor that," said an old chap from the corner . . .

ROBERT GIBBINGS, *Sweet Thames Run Softly*

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CASE OF THE ERYMANTHIAN BOAR

"You cannot cheat a policeman," said Hercule Poirot. "You comprehend?"

by AGATHA CHRISTIE

HERCULE POIROT was in Switzerland.

He had passed an agreeable couple of days at Chamonix, lingered a day or two at Montreux and then went on to Aldermatt, a spot which he had heard various friends praise highly.

Aldermatt, however, affected him unpleasantly. It was at the end of a valley with towering snow peaked mountains shutting it in. He felt, unreasonably, that it was difficult to breathe.

"Impossible to remain here," said Poirot to himself. It was at that moment that he caught sight of a funicular railway. "Decidedly, I must mount."

The funicular, he discovered, ascended first to Les Avines, then to Caurouchet and finally to Rochers Neiges, nine thousand feet above sea level.

Poirot did not propose mounting as high as all that. Les Avines, he thought, would be quite sufficiently his affair.

But here he reckoned without that element of chance which plays so large a part in life. The funicular had started when the conductor approached Poirot and demanded his ticket. After he had inspected it and punched it with a fearsome pair of clippers, he returned it with a bow. At the same time Poirot felt a small wad of paper pressed into his hand with the ticket.

The eyebrows of Hercule Poirot rose a little on his forehead. Presently, unostentatiously, without hurrying himself, he smoothed out the wad of paper. It proved to be a hurriedly scribbled note written in pencil.

Impossible—it ran—*to mistake that moustache! I salute you, my dear colleague. If you are willing, you can be of great assistance to me. You have doubtless read of the* affaire Salley*? The killer—Marrascaud—is believed to have a rendezvous with some members of his gang at Rochers Neiges—of all places in the world! Our information is reliable. So keep your eyes open, my friend. Get in touch with Inspector Drouet who is on the spot. He is a sound man—though he cannot pretend to the brilliance of*

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Hercule Poirot. It is important, my friend, that Marrascaud should be taken—and taken alive. He is not a man—he is a wild boar—one of the most dangerous killers alive today. I did not risk speaking to you at Aldermatt as I might have been observed and you will have a freer hand if you are thought to be a mere tourist. Good hunting! Your old friend—Lementeuil.

Thoughtfully, Hercule Poirot caressed his moustache. Yes, indeed, impossible to mistake that feature of Hercule Poirot. Now what was all this? He had read in the papers the details of *l' affaire Salley*—the cold-blooded murder of a well known Parisian bookmaker. The identity of the murderer was known. Marrascaud was a member of a well known racecourse gang. He had been suspected of many other killings—but this time his guilt was proved up to the hilt. He had got away, out of France it was thought, and the police in every country in Europe were on the look out for him.

So Marrascaud was said to have a rendezvous at Rochers Neiges . . .

Hercule Poirot shook his head slowly. He was puzzled. For Rochers Neiges was above the snow line. There was a hotel there, but it communicated with the world only by the funicular, standing as it did on a long narrow ledge overhanging the valley. The hotel opened in June, but there was seldom any one there until July and August. It was a place ill-supplied with entrances and exits—if a man were traced there, he was caught in a trap. It seemed a fantastic place to choose as the rendezvous of a gang of criminals.

And yet, if Lementeuil said his information was reliable, then Lementeuil was probably right. Hercule Poirot respected the Swiss Commissaire of Police. He knew him as a sound and dependable man.

Some unknown reason was bringing Marrascaud to this meeting place far above civilization.

Hercule Poirot sighed. To hunt down a ruthless killer was not his idea of a pleasant holiday. Brainwork from an armchair, he reflected, was more in his line. Not to ensnare a wild boar upon a mountainside.

A wild boar—that was the term Lementeuil had used. It was certainly an odd coincidence . . .

He murmured to himself: "The fourth Labour of Hercules. The Erymanthian Boar?"

Quietly, without ostentation, he took careful stock of his fellow passengers.

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On the seat opposite him was an American tourist. The pattern of his clothes, of his overcoat, the grip he carried, down to his hopeful friendliness and his naïve absorption in the scenery, even the guide book in his hand, all gave him away and proclaimed him a small town American seeing Europe for the first time. In another minute or two, Poirot judged, he would break into speech.

On the other side of the carriage a tall, rather distinguished looking man with greyish hair and a big curved nose was reading a German book. He had the strong mobile fingers of a musician or a surgeon.

Farther away still were three men all of the same type. Men with bowed legs and an indescribable suggestion of horsiness about them. They were playing cards. Presently, perhaps, they would suggest a stranger cutting in on the game. At first the stranger would win. Afterwards, the luck would run the other way.

Nothing very unusual about the three men. The only thing that was unusual was the place where they were.

One might have seen them in any train on the way to a race meeting—or on an unimportant liner. But in an almost empty funicular—no!

There was one other occupant of the carriage—a woman. She was tall and dark and had a beautiful face—a face that might have expressed a whole gamut of emotion—but which instead was frozen into a strange inexpressiveness. She looked at no one, staring out at the valley below.

Presently, as Poirot had expected, the American began to talk. His name, he said, was Schwartz. It was his first visit to Europe. The scenery, he said, was just grand. He'd been very deeply impressed by the Castle of Chillon. He didn't think much of Paris as a city—overrated—he'd been to the Folies Bergères and the Louvre and Nôtre Dame—and he'd noticed that none of these restaurants and cafés could play hot jazz properly. The Champs Elysées, he thought, was pretty good, and he liked the fountains especially when they were floodlit.

Nobody got out at Les Avines or at Caurouchet. It was clear that everyone in the funicular was destined for Rochers Neiges.

Mr. Schwartz explained his own reasons for going. He had always wished, he said, to be high up among snow mountains. Nine thousand feet was pretty good—he'd heard that you couldn't boil an egg properly when you were as high up as that.

In the innocent friendliness of his heart, Mr. Schwartz endeavoured to draw the tall, grey haired man on the other side of the carriage into the conversation, but the latter merely stared at him coldly over his pince-nez and returned to the perusal of his book.

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Mr. Schwartz then offered to exchange places with the dark lady —she would get a better view, he explained.

It was doubtful whether she understood English. Anyway, she merely shook her head and shrank closer into the fur collar of her coat.

Mr. Schwartz murmured to Poirot:

"Seems kind of wrong to see a woman travelling about alone with no one to see to things for her. A woman needs a lot of looking after when she's travelling."

Mr. Schwartz sighed. He found the world unfriendly. And surely, his brown eyes said expressively, there's no harm in a little friendliness all round?

To be received by a hotel manager correctly garbed in frock coat and patent leather shoes seemed somehow ludicrous in this out of the world, or rather above the world, spot.

The manager was a big handsome man, with an important manner. He was very apologetic.

So early in the season . . . The hot water system was out of order . . . things were hardly in running order . . . Naturally, he would do everything he could . . . Not a full staff yet . . . He was quite confused by the unexpected number of visitors.

It all came rolling out with professional urbanity and yet it seemed to Poirot that behind the urbane *façade* he caught a glimpse of some poignant anxiety. This man, for all his easy manner, was *not* at ease. He was worried about something.

Lunch was served in a long room overlooking the valley far below. The solitary waiter, addressed as Gustave, was skilful and adroit. He darted here and there, advising on the menu, whipping out his wine list.

The three horsy men sat at a table together. They laughed and talked in French, their voices rising. Good old Joseph!—What about the little Denise, *mon vieux*?—Do you remember that *sacré* pig of a horse that let us all down at Auteuil?

It was all very hearty, very much in character—and incongruously out of place!

The woman with the beautiful face sat alone at a table in the corner. She looked at no one.

Afterwards, as Poirot was sitting in the lounge, the manager came to him and was confidential.

Monsieur must not judge the hotel too hardly. It was out of the season. No one came here till the end of July. That lady, Monsieur had noticed her, perhaps? She came at this time every year. Her husband had been killed climbing three years ago. It was very sad. They had been very devoted. She came here always before the season commenced—so as to be quiet. It was a sacred

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pilgrimage. The elderly gentleman was a famous doctor, Dr. Karl Lutz, from Vienna. He had come here, so he said, for quiet and repose.

"It is peaceful, yes," agreed Hercule Poirot. "And *ces Messieurs* there?" He indicated the three horsy men. "Do they also seek repose, do you think?"

The manager shrugged his shoulders. Again there appeared in his eyes that worried look. He said vaguely:

"Ah, the tourists, they wish always a new experience . . . The altitude—that alone is a new sensation."

It was not, Poirot thought, a very pleasant sensation. He was conscious of his own rapidly beating heart. The lines of a nursery rhyme ran idiotically through his mind. "*Up above the world so high, Like a tea tray in the sky.*"

Schwartz came into the lounge. His eyes brightened when he saw Poirot. He came over to him at once.

"I've been talking to that doctor. He speaks English after a fashion. He's a Jew—turned out of Austria by the Nazis. Say, I guess those people must've been crazy! This Doctor Lutz was quite a big man, I gather—nerve specialist—psycho-analysis—that kind of stuff."

His eyes went to where the tall woman was looking out of a window at remorseless mountains. He lowered his voice.

"I got her name from the waiter. She's a Madame Grandier. Her husband was killed climbing. That's why she comes here. I sort of feel, don't you, that we ought to do something about it—try to take her out of herself?"

Hercule Poirot said:

"If I were you I should not attempt it."

But the friendliness of Mr. Schwartz was indefatigable.

Poirot saw him make his overtures, saw the remorseless way in which they were rebuffed. The two stood together for a minute silhouetted against the light. The woman was taller than Schwartz. Her head was thrown back and her expression was cold and forbidding.

He did not hear what she said, but Schwartz came back looking crestfallen.

"Nothing doing," he said. He added wistfully: "Seems to me that as we're all human beings together, there's no reason why we shouldn't be friendly to one another. Don't you agree, Mr. ——— You know, I don't know *your* name?"

"My name," said Poirot, "is Poirier." He added: "I am a silk merchant from Lyons."

"I'd like to give you my card, M. Poirier, and if ever you come

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to Fountain Springs you'll be sure of a welcome."

Poirot accepted the card, clapped his hand to his own pocket, murmured:

"Alas, I have not a card on me at the moment . . ."

That night, when he went to bed, Poirot read through Lementeuil's letter carefully before replacing it, neatly folded, in his wallet. As he got into bed he said to himself:

"It is curious—I wonder if . . ."

Gustave the waiter brought Hercule Poirot his breakfast of coffee and rolls. He was apologetic over the coffee.

"Monsieur comprehends, does he not, that at this altitude it is impossible to have the coffee really hot? Lamentably, it boils too soon."

Poirot murmured:

"One must accept these vagaries of Nature with fortitude."

Gustave murmured:

"Monsieur is a philosopher."

He went to the door, but instead of leaving the room, he took one quick look outside, then shut the door again and returned to the bedside. He said:

"M. Hercule Poirot? I am Drouet, Inspector of Police."

"Ah," said Poirot, "I had already suspected as much."

Drouet lowered his voice.

"M. Poirot, something very grave has occurred. There has been an accident to the funicular!"

"An accident?" Poirot sat up. "What kind of an accident?"

"Nobody has been injured. It happened in the night. It was occasioned, perhaps, by natural causes—a small avalanche that swept down boulders and rocks. But it is possible that there was a human agency at work. One does not know.

"In any case, the result is that it will take many days to repair and that in the meantime we are cut off up here. So early in the season, when the snow is still heavy, it is impossible to communicate with the valley below."

Hercule Poirot sat up in bed. He said softly:

"That is very interesting."

The Inspector nodded.

"Yes," he said. "It shows that our commissaire's information was correct. Marrascaud has a *rendezvous* here, and he has made sure that that *rendezvous* shall not be interrupted."

Hercule Poirot cried impatiently:

"But it is fantastic!"

"I agree." Inspector Drouet threw up his hands. "It does not make the commonsense—*but there it is.* This Marrascaud, you

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know, is a fantastic creature! Myself," he nodded, "I think he is *mad*."

Poirot said:

"A madman *and* a murderer!"

Drouet said dryly:

"It is not amusing. I agree."

Poirot said slowly:

"But if he has a *rendezvous* here, on this ledge of snow high above the world, then it also follows that Marrascaud himself is here already, since communications are now cut."

Drouet said quietly:

"I know."

Both men were silent for a minute or two. Then Poirot asked:

"Dr. Lutz? Can he be Marrascaud?"

Drouet shook his head.

"I do not think so. There is a real Dr. Lutz—I have seen his pictures in the papers—a distinguished and well known man. This man resembles these photographs closely."

Poirot murmured:

"If Marrascaud is an artist in disguise, he might play the part successfully."

"Yes, but is he? I never heard of him as an expert in disguise. He has not the guile and cunning of the serpent. He is a wild boar, ferocious, terrible, who charges in blind fury."

Poirot said:

"All the same . . ."

Drouet agreed quickly.

"Ah, yes, he is a fugitive from justice. Therefore he is forced to dissemble. So he may—in fact he must be—more or less disguised."

"You have his description?"

The other shrugged his shoulders.

"Roughly only. The official Bertillon photograph and measurements were to have been sent up to me today. I know only that he is a man of thirty odd, of a little over medium height and of dark complexion. No distinguishing marks."

Poirot shrugged his shoulders.

"That could apply to anybody. What about the American, Schwartz?"

"I was going to ask you that. You have spoken with him, and you have lived, I think, much with the English and the Americans. To a casual glance he appears to be the normal travelling American. His passport is in order. It is perhaps strange that he should elect to come here—but Americans when travelling are quite incalculable. What do you think yourself?"

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Hercule Poirot shook his head in perplexity.

He said:

"On the surface, at any rate, he appears to be a harmless slightly over friendly man. He might be a bore, but it seems difficult to regard him as a danger." He went on: "But there are three more visitors here."

The Inspector nodded, his face suddenly eager.

"Yes, and they *are* the type we are looking for. I'll take my oath, M. Poirot, that those three men are at any rate members of Marrascaud's gang. They're racecourse toughs if I ever saw them! And one of the three may be Marrascaud himself."

Hercule Poirot reflected. He recalled the three faces.

One was a broad face with overhanging brows and a fat jowl—a hoggish, bestial face. One was lean and thin with a sharp narrow face and cold eyes. The third man was a pasty faced fellow with a foxy air.

Yes, one of the three might well be Marrascaud, but if so, the question came insistently, *why?* Why should Marrascaud, and two members of his gang journey together and ascend into a rat trap on a mountainside? A meeting surely could be arranged in safer and less fantastic surroundings—in a café—in a railway station—in a crowded cinema—in a public park—somewhere where there were exits in plenty—not here far above the world in a wilderness of snow.

Something of this he tried to convey to Inspector Drouet, and the latter agreed readily enough.

"But yes, it is fantastic; it does not make sense."

"If it is a *rendezvous*, why do they travel *together?* No, indeed, it does not make sense."

Drouet said, his face worried:

"In that case, we have to examine a second supposition. These three men are members of Marrascaud's gang and they have come here to meet Marrascaud himself. Who then *is* Marrascaud?"

Poirot asked:

"What about the staff of the hotel?"

Drouet shrugged his shoulders.

"There is no staff to speak of. There is an old woman who cooks, there is her old husband Jacques—they have been here for fifty years I should think. There is the waiter whose place I have taken, that is all."

Poirot said:

"The manager, he knows of course who you are?"

"Naturally. It needed his co-operation."

"Has it struck you," said Hercule Poirot, "that he looks worried?"

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The remark seemed to strike Drouet. He said thoughtfully:

"Yes, that is true."

"It may be that it is merely the anxiety of being involved in police proceedings."

"But you think it may be more than that? You think that he may—know something?"

"It occurred to me, that is all."

Drouet said sombrely: "I wonder."

He paused and then went on:

"Could one get it out of him, do you think?"

Poirot shook his head doubtfully. He said:

"It would be better, I think, not to let him know of our suspicions. Keep your eye on him, that is all."

Drouet nodded. He turned towards the door.

"You've no suggestions, M. Poirot? I—I know your reputation. We have heard of you in this country of ours."

Poirot said perplexedly:

"For the moment I can suggest nothing. It is the *reason* which escapes me—the reason for a *rendezvous* in this place. In fact, the reason for a *rendezvous* at all?"

"Money," said Drouet succinctly.

"He was robbed, then, as well as murdered, this poor fellow Salley?"

"Yes, he had a very large sum of money on him which has disappeared."

"And the *rendezvous* is for the purpose of sharing out, you think?"

"It is the most obvious idea."

Poirot shook his head in a dissatisfied manner.

"Yes, but why *here?*" He went on slowly: "The worst place possible for a *rendezvous* of criminals. But it is a place, this, where one might come to meet a woman . . ."

Drouet took a step forward eagerly.

He said excitedly:

"You think—?"

"I think," said Poirot, "that Madame Grandier is a very beautiful woman. I think that anyone might well mount nine thousand feet for her sake—that is, if she had suggested such a thing."

"You know," said Drouet, "that's interesting. I never thought of her in connection with the case. After all, she's been to this place several years running."

Poirot said gently:

"Yes—and therefore her presence would not cause comment. It would be a reason, would it not, why Rochers Neiges should have been the spot selected?"

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Drouet said excitedly :

" You've had an idea, M. Poirot. I'll look into that angle."

The day passed without incident. Fortunately the hotel was well provisioned. The manager explained that there need be no anxiety. Supplies were assured.

Hercule Poirot endeavoured to get into conversation with Dr. Karl Lutz and was rebuffed. The doctor intimated plainly that psychology was his professional preoccupation and that he was not going to discuss it with amateurs. He sat in a corner reading a large German tome on the subconscious and making copious notes and annotations.

Hercule Poirot went outside and wandered aimlessly round to the kitchen premises. There he entered into conversation with the old man Jacques, who was surly and suspicious. His wife, the cook, was more forthcoming. Fortunately, she explained to Poirot, there was a large reserve of tinned food—but she herself thought little of food in tins. It was wickedly expensive and what nourishment could there be in it ? The good God had never intended people to live out of tins.

The conversation came round to the subject of the hotel staff. Early in July the chambermaids and the extra waiters arrived. But for the next three weeks, there would be nobody or next to nobody. Mostly people who came up and had lunch and then went back again. She and Jacques and one waiter could manage that easily.

Poirot asked :

" There was already a waiter here before Gustave came, was there not ? "

" But yes, indeed, a poor kind of a waiter. No skill, no experience. No class at all."

" How long was he here before Gustave replaced him ? "

" A few days only—the inside of a week. Naturally he was dismissed. We were not surprised. It was bound to come."

Poirot murmured :

" He did not complain unduly ? "

" Ah no, he went quietly enough. After all, what could he expect ? This is a hotel of good class. One must have proper service here."

Poirot nodded. He asked :

" Where did he go ? "

" That Robert, you mean ? " She shrugged her shoulders. " Doubtless back to the obscure café he came from."

" He went down in the funicular ? "

She looked at him curiously.

" Naturally, Monsieur. What other way is there to go ? "

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Poirot asked:

"Did anyone *see* him go?"

They both stared at him.

"Ah! Do you think it likely that one goes to see off an animal like that—that one gives him the grand farewell? One has one's own affairs to occupy one."

"Precisely," said Hercule Poirot.

He walked slowly away, staring up as he did so at the building above him. A large hotel—with only one wing open at present. In the other wings were many rooms, closed and shuttered where no one was likely to enter . . .

He came round the corner of the hotel and nearly ran into one of the three card-playing men. It was the one with the pasty face and pale eyes. The eyes looked at Poirot without expression. Only the lips curled back a little, showing the teeth like a vicious horse.

Poirot passed him and went on. There was a figure ahead of him—the tall graceful figure of Madame Grandier.

He hastened his pace a little and caught her up. He said:

"This accident to the funicular, it is distressing. I hope, Madame, that it has not inconvenienced you?"

She said:

"It is a matter of indifference to me."

Her voice was very deep—a full contralto. She did not look at Poirot. She swerved aside and went into the hotel by a small side door.

Hercule Poirot went to bed early. He was awakened some time after midnight.

Someone was fumbling with the lock of the door.

He sat up, putting on the light. At the same moment the lock yielded to manipulation and the door swung open. Three men stood there, the three card-playing men. They were, Poirot thought, slightly drunk. Their faces were foolish and yet malevolent. He saw the gleam of a razor blade.

The big thickset man advanced. He spoke in a growling voice.

"Sacred pig of a detective! Bah!"

He burst into a torrent of profanity. The three of them advanced purposefully on the defenceless man in the bed.

"We'll carve him up, boys. Eh, little horses? We'll slash Monsieur Detective's face open for him. He won't be the first one tonight."

They came on, steady, purposeful—the razor blades flashed . . .

And then, startling in its crisp transatlantic tones, a voice said:

"Stick 'em up."

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They swerved round. Schwartz, dressed in a peculiarly vivid set of striped pyjamas, stood in the doorway. In his hand he held a revolver.

" Stick 'em up, boys. I'm pretty good at shooting."

He pressed the trigger—and a bullet sang past the big man's ear and buried itself in the woodwork of the window.

Three pairs of hands were raised rapidly.

Schwartz said: " Can I trouble you, M. Poirier ? "

Hercule Poirot was out of bed in a flash. He collected the gleaming weapons and passed his hands over the three men's bodies to make sure that they were not armed.

Schwartz said:

" Now then, march ! There's a big cupboard just along the corridor. No window in it. Just the thing."

He marched them into it and turned the key on them. He swung round to Poirot, his voice breaking with pleasurable emotion.

" If that doesn't just show ? Do you know, M. Poirier, there were folks in Fountain Springs who laughed at me because I said I was going to take a gun abroad with me ? ' Where do you think you're going ? ' they asked. ' Into the jungle ? ' Well, sir, I'd say the laugh is with me. Did you ever see such an ugly bunch of toughs ? "

Poirot said:

" My dear Mr. Schwartz, you appeared in the nick of time. It might have been a drama on the stage ! I am very much in your debt."

" That's nothing. Where do we go from here ? We ought to turn those boys over to the police, and that's just what we can't do ! It's a knotty problem. Maybe we'd better consult the manager."

Hercule Poirot said:

" Ah, the manager. I think first we will consult the waiter—Gustave—alias Inspector Drouet. But yes—the waiter Gustave is really a detective."

Schwartz stared at him.

" So that's why they did it ! "

" That is why who did what ? "

" This bunch of crooks got to you second on the list. They've already carved up Gustave."

" *What ?* "

" Come with me. The doc's busy on him now."

Drouet's room was a small one on the top floor. Dr. Lutz, in a dressing gown, was busy bandaging the injured man's face.

He turned his head as they entered.

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"Ah! It is you, Mr. Schwartz? A nasty business, this. What butchers! What inhuman monsters!"

Drouet lay still, moaning faintly.

Schwartz asked: "Is he in danger?"

"He will not die if that is what you mean. But he must not speak—there must be no excitement. I have dressed the wounds—there will be no risk of septicæmia."

The three men left the room together. Schwartz said to Poirot:

"Did you say Gustave was a police officer?"

Hercule Poirot nodded.

"But what was he doing up at Rochers Neiges?"

"He was engaged in tracking down a very dangerous criminal."

In a few words Poirot explained the situation.

Dr. Lutz said:

"Marrascaud? I read about the case in the paper. I should much like to meet that man. There is some deep abnormality there! I should like to know the particulars of his childhood and early life."

"For myself," said Hercule Poirot, "I should like to know exactly where he is at this minute."

Schwartz said:

"Isn't he one of the three we locked in the cupboard?"

Poirot said in a dissatisfied voice:

"It is possible—yes, but me, I am not sure . . . I have an idea—"

He broke off, staring down at the carpet. It was of a light buff colour and there were marks on it of a deep rusty brown.

Hercule Poirot said:

"Footsteps—footsteps that have trodden, I think, in blood and they lead from the unused wing of the hotel. Come—we must be quick!"

They followed him, through a swing door and along a dim, dusty corridor. They turned the corner of it, still following the marks on the light carpet until the tracks led them to a half open doorway.

Poirot pushed the door open and entered.

He uttered a sharp, horrified exclamation.

The room was a bedroom. The bed had been slept in and there was a tray of food on the table.

In the middle of the floor lay the body of a man. He was of just over middle height and he had been attacked with savage and ubelievable ferocity. There were a dozen wounds on his arms and chest and his head and face had been battered almost to a pulp.

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Schwartz gave a half stifled exclamation and turned away, looking as though he might be sick.

Dr. Lutz uttered a horrified exclamation in German.

Schwartz said faintly:

"Who is this guy? Does anyone know?"

"I fancy," said Poirot, "that he was known here as Robert, a rather unskilful waiter . . ."

Lutz had gone nearer, bending over the body. He pointed with a finger.

There was a paper pinned to the dead man's breast. It had some words scrawled on it in ink.

Marrascaud will kill no more—nor will he rob his friends!

Schwartz ejaculated:

"*Marrascaud?* So this is *Marrascaud!* But what brought him up here to this out of the way spot? And why do you say his name is Robert?"

Poirot said:

"He was here masquerading as a waiter—and by all accounts he was a very bad waiter. So bad that no one was surprised when he was given the sack. He left—presumably to return to Andermatt. *But nobody saw him go.*"

Lutz said in his slow rumbling voice:

"So—and what do you think happened?"

Poirot replied:

"I think we have here the explanation of a certain worried expression on the hotel manager's face. Marrascaud must have offered him a big bribe to allow him to remain hidden in the unused part of the hotel . . ."

He added thoughtfully: "But the manager was not happy about it. Oh no, he was not happy at all."

"And Marrascaud continued to live in this unused wing with no one but the manager knowing about it?"

"So it seems. It would be quite possible, you know."

Dr. Lutz said:

"And why was he killed? And who killed him?"

Schwartz cried:

"That's easy. He was to share out the money with his gang. He didn't. He double-crossed them. He came here, to this out of the way place, to lie low for a while. He thought it was the last place in the world they'd ever think of. He was wrong. Somehow or other they got wise to it and followed him." He touched the dead body with the tip of his shoe. "And they settled his account—like this."

Hercule Poirot murmured:

"Yes, it was not quite the kind of *rendezvous* we thought."

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Dr. Lutz said irritably:

"These hows and whys may be very interesting, but I am concerned with our present position. Here we have a dead man. I have a sick man on my hands and a limited amount of medical supplies. And we are cut off from the world! For how long?"

Schwartz added:

"*And* we've got three murderers locked in a cupboard! It's what I'd call kind of an interesting situation."

Dr. Lutz said:

"What do we do?"

Poirot said:

"First, we get hold of the manager. He is not a criminal, that one, only a man who was greedy for money. He is a coward, too. He will do everything we tell him. My good friend Jacques, or his wife, will perhaps provide some cord. Our three miscreants must be placed where we can guard them in safety until the day when help comes. I think that Mr. Schwartz's automatic will be effective in carrying out any plans we may make."

Dr. Lutz said:

"And I? What do I do?"

"You, doctor," said Poirot gravely, "will do all you can for your patient. The rest of us will employ ceaseless vigilance—and wait. There is nothing else we can do."

It was three days later that a little party of men appeared in front of the hotel in the early hours of the morning.

It was Hercule Poirot who opened the front door to them with a flourish.

"Welcome, *mon vieux*."

Monsieur Lementeuil, Commissaire of Police, seized Poirot by both hands.

"Ah, my friend, with what emotion I greet you! What stupendous events—what emotions you have passed through! And we below, our anxiety, our fears—knowing nothing—fearing everything. No wireless—no means of communication. To heliograph, that was indeed a stroke of genius on your part."

"No, no," Poirot endeavoured to look modest. "After all, when the inventions of man fail, one falls back upon Nature. There is always the sun in the sky."

The little party filed into the hotel. Lementeuil said:

"We are not expected?" His smile was somewhat grim.

Poirot smiled also. He said:

"But no! It is believed that the funicular is not nearly repaired yet."

Lementeuil said with emotion:

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" Ah, this is a great day. There is no doubt, you think ? It is really Marrascaud ? "

" It is Marrascaud all right. Come with me."

They went up the stairs. A door opened and Schwartz came out in his dressing gown. He stared when he saw the men.

" I heard voices," he explained. " Why, what's this ? "

Hercule Poirot said grandiloquently :

" Help has come ! Accompany us, monsieur. This is a great moment."

He started up the next flight of stairs.

Schwartz said :

" Are you going up to Drouet ? How is he, by the way ? "

" Dr. Lutz reported him going on well last night."

They came to the door of Drouet's room. Poirot flung it open. He announced :

" *Here is your wild boar, gentlemen.* Take him alive and see to it that he does not cheat the guillotine."

The man in the bed, his face still bandaged, started up. But the police officers had him by the arms before he could move.

Schwartz cried, bewildered :

" But that's Gustave the waiter—that's Inspector Drouet."

" It is Gustave, yes—*but it is not Drouet.* Drouet was the *first* waiter, the waiter Robert who was imprisoned in the unused part of the hotel and whom Marrascaud killed the same night as the attack was made on me."

Over breakfast, Poirot explained gently to the bewildered American.

" You comprehend, there are certain things one *knows*—knows quite certainly in the course of one's profession. One knows, for instance, the difference between a detective and a murderer ! Gustave was no waiter—that I suspected at once—but equally *he was not a policeman.* I have dealt with policemen all my life and I *know.* He could pass as a detective to an outsider—but not to a man who was *a policeman himself.*

" And so, at once, I was suspicious. That evening, I did not drink my coffee. I poured it away. And I was wise. Late that evening a man came into my room, came in with the easy confidence of one who knows that the man whose room he is searching is drugged.

" He looked through my affairs and he found the letter in my wallet—where I had left it for him to find ! The next morning Gustave comes into my room with my coffee. He greets me by name and acts his part with complete assurance. But he is anxious —horribly anxious—for somehow or other the police have got on

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his track! They have learned where he is and that is for him a terrible disaster. It upsets all his plans. He is caught up here like a rat in a trap."

Schwartz said:

"The damn fool thing was ever to come here! Why did he?"

Poirot said gravely:

"It is not so foolish as you think. He had need, urgent need, of a retired spot, away from the world, where he could meet a certain person, and where a certain happening could take place."

"What person?"

"Dr. Lutz."

"Dr. Lutz? Is he a crook, too?"

"Dr. Lutz is really Dr. Lutz—but he is not a nerve specialist—nor a psycho-analyst. He is a surgeon, my friend, *a surgeon who specializes in facial surgery*. That is why he was to meet Marrascaud here. He is poor now, turned out of his country. He was offered a huge fee to meet a man here and change that man's appearance by means of his surgical skill.

"He may well have guessed that that man was a criminal, but if so, he shut his eyes to the fact. Realize this, they dared not risk a nursing home in some foreign country. No, up here, where no one ever comes so early in the season except for an odd visit, where the manager is a man in need of money who can be bribed, was an ideal spot.

"But, as I say, matters went wrong. Marrascaud was betrayed. The three men, his bodyguard, who were to meet him here and look after him had not yet arrived, but Marrascaud acts at once. The police officer who is pretending to be a waiter is kidnapped and Marrascaud *takes his place*. The gang arrange for the funicular to be wrecked.

"It is a matter of *time*. The following evening Drouet is killed and a paper is pinned on the dead body. It is hoped that by the time the communications are established with the world Drouet's body may have been buried as that of Marrascaud. Dr. Lutz performs his operation without delay. But one man must be silenced—Hercule Poirot. So the gang are sent to attack me. Thanks to you, my friend—"

Hercule Poirot bowed graciously to Schwartz who said:

"So you're really Hercule Poirot?"

"Precisely."

"And you were never fooled by that body for a minute? You knew all along that it *wasn't* Marrascaud?"

"Certainly."

"Why didn't you say so?"

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Hercule Poirot's face was suddenly stern.

" Because I wanted to be quite sure of handing the real Marrascaud over to the police."

He murmured below his breath :

" *To capture alive the wild boar of Erymanthea . . .*"

* * *

THE STORK WHO MARRIED A DUMB WIFE

A Danish stork was in the habit of spending six nights a week out in the town with the boys, drinking and dicing and playing cards. His wife had never left their nest, which was on a chimney top, since he married her, for he did not want her to get wise to the ways of the male. When he got home, which was usually at four o'clock in the morning—unless the party had gone on to *Reuben's*—he always brought her a box of chocolates and handed it to her together with a stork story, which is the same as a cock-and-bull story.

" I've been out delivering babies," he would say. " It's killing me, but it is my duty to go on." " Who do you deliver babies for ? " she asked one morning. " Human beings," he said. " A human being cannot have a baby without help from someone. All the other animals can, but human beings are helpless." Just then the phone rang and the stork answered it. " Another baby on the way," he said when he had hung up. " I'll have to go out again tonight." So that night he went out again and did not get home until seven thirty in the morning. " Thish was very special case," he said, handing his wife a box of chocolates. " Five girls." He did not add that the five girls were all blondes in their twenties.

After a while the female stork got to thinking. Her husband had told her never to leave the nest, because the world was full of stork traps, but she began to doubt this. So she flew out into the world, looking and listening. In this way she learned to tell time and to take male talk with a grain of salt ; she discovered that the offspring of the human species are never brought into the world by storks. This last discovery was a great blow to her, but it was a greater blow to her husband when he came home the next morning at a quarter to six. " Hello, you phony obstetrician," said his wife coldly. " How are all the blonde quintuplets today ? " And she crowned him with a chimney brick.

Moral : The male was made to lie and roam, but woman's place is in the home.

JAMES THURBER

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'NEEZER'S BAIL

And this, it seemed, must be the last grand instalment

by ANNIE MAE BROWN

LILY, our coloured cook, was as much a part of our lives as the white, three-storied house we lived in at the edge of a little Alabama town. Her girth was so immense that my ten year old arms could in no way span it, though I tried for the sake of laying my head against her huge softness. For one so big, she was extremely light on her feet and moved about our kitchen with a certain grace and a speed that was amazing. My mother once said to her, " Lily, you must have been a good dancer."

" Yes, 'm, Mis' Bessie," Lily said proudly. " I could dance glad in my younger days ! "

And glad was, perhaps, the keyword for Lily; not a noisy gladness, but a quality of being supremely equal to all tasks or situations that might confront her. Almost everything that she did was done for other people rather than for herself, but she got great pleasure out of doing it so well. Her fried chicken was just a little crisper, her hot biscuits just a little richer, her deep-dish apple pie was sweeter, and yet tartar than any other cook's, and her cornbread perfumed a house. But if Lily's red 'kerchief was the bright centre of our family life, 'Neezer was our cross.

We bore him because he was Lily's husband—and no one who did not know 'Neezer could realize the tribute to Lily which this conveyed. I mean, 'Neezer was not something just to bear lightly. He could do less under greater compulsion than many men many times his size. Father had even given up trying to move 'Neezer, and thus left the whole burden to Lily and my mother. Worse, 'Neezer was addicted. He was addicted more or less all the time, but especially on Saturdays.

Thus, on Monday mornings Lily would ask mother, " Mis' Bessie, could I have three dollars bevance to bail 'Neezer ? "

My father would ask, " Why ? "

And my mother would answer him, " He is her husband and she loves him ! " And 'Neezer would be bailed.

Once Lily was quite upset. " Po' lil 'Neezer ! Dey got him again an' he bain't even got his us'al room ! "

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" Good ! " Father said. " I hope he's homesick ! "

And mother said, " Hush ! "

Everyone was so pleased with the things that Lily was doing for them that I think in all the world my mother was the only one who thought of doing things for Lily. She was Lily's good friend. And combing out my pigtails and rebraiding them, Lily would say, " Yo' goin' t'have hair like yo' mammie ! " And I would vision my head piled high with beautiful golden hair. She would say to my older brother who had reached a stage of slouching, shambling carriage, " Hol' yo'se'f straight like yo' mammie ! " For we must strive to attain the perfection mother had in the eyes of Lily.

Often I came upon them in the morning in the kitchen, suggesting and rejecting this or that for supper or lunch until Lily would break off to say, " Lor' Mis' Bessie, I is got to get somethin' fo' Martha's baby sho' ! "

And mother would raise her head, and with a slight, concentrating frown, help Lily decide what her daughter Martha would need. Between the two there flowed a deep understanding that came from long association and mutual respect. Sometimes mother sat in the kitchen with her embroidery or a sock that she was darning, and while Lily shelled the peas or stirred up one of her heavenly chocolate cakes, she and mother comforted one another about family problems, or laughed about something that happened long ago when Lily first came to the bride, Mis' Bessie.

All my own days Lily and Uncle 'Neezer had lived in a tiny house in our back yard, and every morning Lily came into the big house to shake the wood ashes from the stove and light a new fire, and then the smell of coffee and frying bacon permeated the whole house and made getting out of bed easier. In the afternoons, Lily sat in the big rocker and rocked my little brother Bert to sleep, while I would stand with my foot on top of the rocker to keep my toes out of harm's way and listen to her singing. In between whiles, she taught us countless signs and omens that might not have been so, but made life very interesting.

Even the way a spider built its web had special meanings for Lily. Sometimes she even saw hopeful signs as she led Uncle 'Neezer—who was always full of contrition and promises—home from the jail.

Because 'Neezer presided over them, our flowers were never quite what they might have been, but, for some reason, he did give a little care to one white narcissus bulb that grew near the back door.

I decided that this was because it was close to the lovely scents of Lily's cooking, and he could also make it an excuse for not doing

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all the other things he was supposed to do. " 'Neezer, is yo' raked de yard ? " Lily would enquire.

" I jus' mus' give dis ole 'cissus a lil bit of topsoil," or " I'se jus' fixin' a stake fo' dis ole 'cissus," 'Neezer would answer.

The bulb came to be known as 'Neezer's 'cissus, and in the spring it did have lovely paper-white flowers with little gold cups in the centres.

Keeping her eye on Uncle 'Neezer—between his complete falls from grace and his attentions to the narcissus—was a regular part of Lily's day, stoking the fire ; she would dart to the kitchen door and call, " 'Neezer ? " in a pleasant voice. " 'Neezer, is yo' spread de chicken manure ? "

Getting no answer, she glided rapidly back to the stove to put the biscuits in the oven, made sure the stove was drawing—and was back at the door. And her second call would be slightly louder and more urgent. " 'Neezer, is yo' rakin' an' is yo' sure de hens ain't in de lettuce again ? " or " 'Neezer, is yo' chopped de wood an' weeded de flower beds ? " On her third call, 'Neezer would appear from behind the henhouse and the relief Lily felt would show in her face as she said, " 'Neezer, yo' keep a doin' proper, now ! "

In the winter of the year that I was ten, we had our first snowfall early one afternoon, and by suppertime Uncle 'Neezer was complaining of misery in his chest. I heard Lily tell my mother as she laid the table.

And the next day Uncle 'Neezer smelled of turpentine, camphor and wintergreen which Lily had rubbed over his back and chest before pinning folded flannel to his long underwear.

Suddenly in the night Lily was calling for Mis' Bessie from halfway up the stairs. Her voice was urgent and held a hint of panic, and I glimpsed my mother drawing on her dressing gown and running to join her on the stair. " 'Neezer is took bad ! " Lily said, and they ran down the stairs and across the yard to Lily's little house.

Next day, our doctor came and went, and then came again. And little Bert and I sat on Lily's steps, wrapped in our snowsuits, listening to the sounds coming from inside as mother and Lily moved about. Finally father came, and he, too, went in with mother and Lily.

The suspense and dread that children feel when their elders are in trouble was more than I could bear, and I quietly opened Lily's door and peeped inside.

Uncle 'Neezer was hidden from view by blankets and by my mother who was standing with her hand on Lily's shoulder as Lily

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sat by the bed. Father was chewing his moustache, while Lily was crying as a baby cries, with her face turned up towards my mother and the tears running down her cheeks. Just then the doctor took his stethoscope from Uncle 'Neezer's chest and gently pulled the sheet over Uncle 'Neezer's face. I saw mother's hand tighten on Lily's shoulder, and father stepped closer and kept patting Lily's other shoulder in the ineffectual way men have in times of stress.

Mother met father's eyes and slightly inclined her head towards the door, and they both followed the doctor from Lily's bedroom into her parlour.

In the instant before my mother spied me and sent me outside, I saw Lily slip to her knees beside the bed, resting her arm across the frail stillness of Uncle 'Neezer. In a voice of anguished entreaty, she begged, as she had so often begged, " 'Neezer, yo' keep a doin' proper now ! "

And I realized that Lily was fearful that Uncle 'Neezer might not properly rake and weed the celestial lawns and bright beds of Heaven.

She gave way to her grief as frankly as she had always given way to laughter that shook her whole frame, or to brief wrath when her face became a thunder cloud as she scolded us children.

But her grief didn't pass or grow calmer. She cried when she saw a tool that 'Neezer had used. She cried when she looked at the 'cissus plant. She cried when mother spoke to her, or if Bert or I asked her questions. So much of her time was spent at prayer meetings that her housework fell off, and she even began to burn things in the oven. Lily, who had always been equal to everything, seemed shattered by something with which she could not cope.

She also muttered constantly, " Po' lil 'Neezer . . ." And one Monday morning it suddenly dawned on me that what was breaking Lily was the fear that where 'Neezer was now, bail was not accepted.

Evidently mother guessed it, too, for once when she put her hand on Lily's shoulder and Lily promptly burst into tears, she said, " Lily, I feel sure the good Lord has made allowances for 'Neezer's weaknesses—"

" I dunno, ma'am," Lily sobbed. " It would have t' be a powerful bit of allowing even for de Lord ! "

And then an astonishing thing happened. " Why," mother asked, " don't you ask the Lord for a sign ? "

Lily looked up, animated by hope for the first time in weeks. " What sort of sign, Mis' Bessie ? " she asked trustfully—and if I had been the Lord I would have had to send a flash of lightning or a special angel right then.

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" I don't think you should ask for any particular sign," mother said, smiling strangely. " Just keep asking for a sign and keep watching and hoping."

The last cold rains of winter passed. " Yo' think I is sho' t' know de sign, Mis' Bessie ? " Lily asked anxiously.

" Of course you will ! " mother said. " Don't be foolish ! "

The trees put out the beginnings of buds, and the bulbs sent up flat, green swords of hope. Everything looked as if God really loved the world very much for all its faults. Then one day I heard Lily shouting for my mother in so strange and exalted a voice that I was frightened.

As I reached the door from the dining room into the kitchen, Lily entered from the yard and she was shining with a light that was not of the spring sun. " Mis' Bessie ! Mis' Bessie ! De sign done come ! " Her broad face beamed with all its lost joy of life and all its great goodness of a little child. " Mis' Bessie, 'Neezer's 'cissus done come in flower pure gold of Heaven ! "

" Good gracious ! Are you sure ? " mother said.

We went to see, and there, sure enough, was a narcissus such as I had never seen. It was bigger than any of the paper-whites that danced through the old orchards of the town. The inner flower-cups were brighter than the red gold of the mines—bright as the harps of the holy angels—while the great skirt-petals were the yellow of celestial sunlight upon the streets of Heaven.

Overwhelmed, I stared at the flower, while Lily knelt beside it, happily touching its radiance of airy beauty. " Oh, Mis' Bessie ! I can stop worritin' all night long 'bout 'Neezer ! " Lily breathed happily. " Yes, ma'am ! There was one thing you could say fo' Ebeneezer : he was a good man an' a fine husband ! "

I opened my mouth to set her straight, but my mother was threatening me with her eyes.

" Yes, Lily," she said. " He was a good man and a fine husband."

Some weeks later my father made an unexpected raid upon the family bills. Suddenly he stopped his checking and frowned. " Margaret ! What in the world is this ? Five dollars for a single bulb ? Have you gone out of your mind ? "

My mother snatched the bill from him and tossed her gold braided head. " I did without my spring hat for that ! And it is no business of yours if I spend a little something occasionally on something foolish—and—and if you ever mention this to a living person—I—I'll never speak to you again in this world ! " She saw me. " And that goes for you, too . . . You are never even

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to think about this, do you understand ! Never ! Never ! Never—and I mean it ! "

We both looked at her and loved her and said, " We promise ! "

What we were really dealing with was, we realized, the last instalment on 'Neezer's bail.

* * *

A MAN'S BEST FRIEND

Is his dog, we are told, or his horse or his cat—whatever in fact his fancy pleases, provided it walks on all of its four feet. But here are some four-footed beasts that are mainly masterless. Can you recognize them ? Count one point for the animal, one for the source and one for the author in each case, making a maximum total of thirty points. The answers are on page 79.

1. *He obviously suffered from insomnia, but his choice of a day bed must have been highly inconvenient for his co-habitants around teatime.*
2. *An unqualified pacifist was this gentle creature, in spite of his size and strength. And who could blame his reluctance to exchange a flower-filled meadow for the noise and dust of the bull ring ?*
3. *A* vers libre *versifier, and philosopher of sorts—his typewriter must have given him a headache, no less than his feline lady friend.*
4. *From the enormous number of applicants who replied to his advertisement for a pet, this clever creature selected a cigar smoking poodle with the fine old French name of Bill.*
5. *His voice was merrier than the merry organ that played in the church on feast days—but pride went before a fall !*
6. *" No animal will more repay a treatment kind and fair ; at least so lonely people say . . ." but you must be careful how you address him, for he is reputed sensitive to epithets !*
7. *" What cat's averse to fish ? " asks the poet. None, we may suppose, but this one paid a heavy price for hers—albeit they were gold.*
8. *Why should a dinner date even on a wedding anniversary matter to a borrowed horse whose head was turned always for home ? This one certainly led his worthy rider a dance, though the ride makes diverting history.*
9. *" Every dog shall have his day," says the adage, and this one, with a taste for dog latin, certainly had his, at the expense of all the cats, frumps and infants, in the neighbourhood.*
10. *Living in a backwater, and disobeying the law of gravity, these busy little creatures contrived to have a dabbling good time, especially, we imagine, on the kitchen front !*

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★*In the fabulous city of Old Baghdad, with C. G. Campbell for our storyteller, we may look for the authentic flavour of the Thousand and One Nights and not be disappointed. Lust, beauty, intrigue and robust good humour are the constant elements of these lively tales, told with an earthy vigour that never fails to enchant.*

STORY OF THE SHEIKH MIZEIL

by C. G. CAMPBELL

ONCE in the days of the Ottomans there lived in Baghdad a man of an ancient and noble family named Sheikh Mizeil el Qurnachi, and he lived in a great house by the banks of the Tigris. Yet his estates had been reduced by the taxation and oppression of the Ottomans, and his crops spoiled by locust and by flood until he was reduced to poverty.

So he lived in his house with his only daughter without a single servant or a single slave, nor was there any furniture or silver left in his house, for he had sold all to buy food. Yet the house he could not sell, for it would be shameful for him to do so, since it was the house of his ancestors.

The name of his daughter was Nura. She was in the seventeenth year of her life, yet none had asked for her in marriage, for since there were no servant girls to gossip about her beauty, the boys of great and noble families had not even heard of her. Else surely their sleep would have been troubled by her description, for her hair was as black as the Shat-el-'Arab on a clear winter's night, and her eyes were as the stars which glisten in its waters, her skin was as golden as the desert sand when tinged by the first rosy red rays of dawn, her back was as supple as the reeds before the wind, and her thighs and breasts had the softness of the feather quilt which allures the tired traveller.

So one day Nura went to her father and she said to him: O my beloved father. Shall I be forever a cook in your household or shall I be the mother of noble sons?

And Sheikh Mizeil grieved much at the words of his daughter, and his heart was sad. And on the nights of the full moon Nura

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would go out on the roof of their great house, and speak to the moon and ask the question:

O Moon, you shine on youths and maidens,
Where is my lover, where is he,
He who will love me with the strongest love?

And the moon, ashamed at the waste of such beauty, would hide behind the nearest cloud.

But one day Sheikh Mizeil came on his daughter and found her weeping, so he took her hand and said to her: O my little one, know you that we are more unfortunate than the poorest beggar of the City of Peace. For were I of the general run of men, I could work as a clerk, or as a washerman, or even as a porter or sweeper, and so gain a little money. But our name is a known name and it is shameful for me to work, or that any should know of our poverty. Therefore starvation faces us, and it is in my mind that we should cut the veins in our wrists, and so depart, but first take you this the last of my gold and make yourself a dress fit for a woman of our family, that when the neighbours come in and lay out our bodies for burial they may find you dressed as befits our dignity.

So Nura put on her veil and she took the gold coins from her father, though the tears flowed from her eyes. And Nura went to the market and she went to the sellers of fine stuffs. And she bought the finest silk. Yet there was still some of the money unspent, so she went into a great shop, thinking: I will buy sequins with the last of the money and cover the dress with sequins, that in death they who find me will remember me.

So she went to the merchant, who was named Jassim, and she asked of him for sequins, and he showed her jar after jar filled with the finest sequins of every known colour, and also of colours that are no longer remembered. And she gazed at the sequins and she gazed at her silk that she might exactly match its delicate colour. And while comparing the colours she let her veil slip from her face. Yet such was her concentration that she did not know that her beauty was exposed.

And the merchant Jassim gazed at her, and his gaze was the gaze of a jackal which looks at a dying gazelle, for Jassim was among those who desire the despoiling of girls, and his thoughts were evil thoughts. And he looked at Nura's face and he looked at the cloth of her cloak and her veil and he thought: She is not rich, yet her face is beyond compare, but who can dispense with caution? First I must discover her station and know if she has any brother or father to avenge her honour.

And since he did not know her, or from whence she came, he thought of a cunning ruse. When she bought the sequins and

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ordered fifty *mithkals* of them, he weighed them out and packed them in a paper bag, but with his little finger he pierced the paper of the bag and left in it a small hole. So when Nura paid for the sequins and took the bag, it left a trail of sequins. Yet such was Nura's distraction and grief that she noticed it not.

Nura left the shop and returned to her father's house, and at a safe distance behind her followed Jassim. Nor was he in any doubt about the path she had taken, for on the ground lay a clear trail of glittering sequins. And through and about narrow passages and side turnings of Baghdad he followed her, though he could not see her, until he came to a great teakwood door studded with brass. And though the door was closed, he knew that she had entered, for the doorstep was sprinkled with sequins and there the trail ended.

So Jassim asked and questioned the poor people of the street concerning the house with the teakwood door, and they replied: That is Qasr Qurnachi, and formerly it was a great and wealthy house, for they used to slaughter ten sheep every day to feed the poor, but now the old sheikh lives there with his only daughter, without any servant or slave, nor does anybody else go in, nor does anybody else come out.

And Jassim thought and pondered, and he said to himself: Qurnachi is a great name. I would be unwise to meddle with that girl, for her father would surely kill me. Rather should I take a better course. Why should I not marry her? Then not only could I enjoy her beauty without fear, but I could also remark to my friends in the coffee-house: My latest wife is a model housekeeper. Of course, you know she is a Qurnachi. And then they will eye me with the eye of respect and my sons will mingle with those of noble blood, and since the sheikh is so poor I will offer him a handsome price and he will accept.

So on the next day Jassim the merchant called at the house of Sheikh Mizeil el Qurnachi, and he knocked on the great door, for he was not acquainted with that conduct which is seemly. And Sheikh Mizeil opened the door himself and bade him welcome and enter, for the Sheikh was a true Arab. And he said to him: I am honoured by your visit, respected merchant, but pardon me for the poorness of your reception, for I gave all my servants and staff permission to go to their homes and take a day's rest. Nor have I anyone here to prepare for you food or coffee, so pardon my rudeness, and pray tell me your name and your business with speed, that you may not linger in discomfort.

And Jassim replied, and his reply was an abrupt reply, lacking in dignity and form, and he said: Noble sheikh as for my name,

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it is Jassim Kuweity, and I own the great cloth shop. And as for my business, it is marriage, for I hear you have a daughter, and as for the sum, I will pay one hundred thousand gold liras.

Sheikh Mizeil was amazed at the words of the merchant and his face went black, and he said: You have lost your way. Are you looking for a brothel? I know your name and I have heard of you. Is it not said that your grandfather sold milk? Does then the vulture mate with the peacock? Were you not beneath contempt you would not live after making this suggestion. As it is, I will give you a lesson in respect even as it is taught to slaves.

And Sheikh Mizeil seized Jassim in a grip of iron and he commenced beating the merchant about the head and ears with his riding-switch until the blood flowed. And when Sheikh Mizeil was satisfied with beating Jassim he took him and cast him out into the dust.

And Nura saw these events from a window of the inner courtyard, and she was amazed, thinking: Was not that the merchant from whom I bought the sequins? How then did he know our house? Then Nura, for she was a clever girl, remembered that the bag of sequins had been half empty on her arrival, and she looked out of the door and saw that the threshold was still sprinkled with sequins, and she thought: This was the stratagem of the lustful merchant.

And as for Jassim, he picked himself up from the dusty street and walked back to his shop, and his heart was full of anger and the desire for revenge. And he pondered: How can I bring this old maniac to ruin, he who has dared to treat me in this manner, he who has not even enough copper coins to put together to make a pair?

And he returned to his shop and he went to his treasure chest and opened it and he counted out ten thousand gold liras. He put the coins in a handkerchief of the finest silk, and he left his shop and went to the house of the Turkish pasha, Commandant of Police. He entered and saluted the officer and he spoke to him after this fashion: O Your Honour, how much have I heard of your wise administration and your great munificence and your benevolent hospitality? I have come in your service to offer you a humble present, which I request you to honour me by expending in your great charitable and hospitable fashion. And Jassim placed the handkerchief of coins on the table, and the Turk eyed the present and saw that it was heavy, and he bade Jassim be seated and he ordered coffee.

And after suitable and polite conversation, Jassim said: O your Excellency the Pasha, I desire to warn you of a most dangerous plot and a devilish intrigue directed against even the Caliph himself,

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and the prime mover who has given birth to this foul conspiracy is none other than an Arab landowner named Sheikh Mizeil el Qurnachi, cursed be his brood.

And the Commandant listened to the words of Jassim, and he summoned an officer and ordered: Take soldiers and go to Qasr Qurnachi and seize the Sheikh and fetter him. Then take him and chain him to the wall in the jail, for he is a danger to the State and an investigation must be made and an enquiry directed into the sedition which he has plotted.

Nura and her father were sitting in their house when they heard the tramp of horses and a thunderous knocking on the great door, and Sheikh Mizeil opened the door to the soldiers to enquire their business. But as for Nura, she turned and hid herself in the great house. And she saw the Turks seize her father and fetter him and lead him away, and she thought: This is the work of the merchant Jassim.

And when the soldiers had taken her father and gone away Nura wept and sobbed until her heart was nearly broken.

But after a time she dried her tears and she ran to a cupboard which contained old clothes, and she took the clothes of a page boy, which had remained there from the days when Sheikh Mizeil had many servants and pages, and she cast off her clothes and she put on the clothes of a boy, and she took a riding-switch and put on a headcloth and *aqal*. And she left the house, thinking: Should I remain, then Jassim will seek me and find me. Yet her feet were bare, for she could find no boy's shoes to fit her feet.

And she walked out into the street and away, not knowing where to go or where to find refuge. And she thought: I will leave Baghdad and go to the great tribes, for the people of the city lack generosity. But he who goes to the tribes, him they feed and shelter, and there I will devise a plan to save my father.

So she walked and walked and went out from Baghdad and took the road to Basra, and she walked for many hours on the dusty road, and all who saw her thought that she was a boy.

And those that passed Nura on the road saluted her and she returned their salutation. And Nura walked and walked until the sun was in the west and her feet were torn and bleeding from the roughness of the road, when she saw before her a great cavalcade of horsemen.

At their head rode a young Sheikh, whose face was as the full moon and whose bearing was as noble as a sword blade, and as they came up to Nura and passed her the riders saluted the walker and their greeting was returned, and the young Sheikh glanced at Nura, whom he thought to be a beautiful boy. And the Sheikh,

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who was none other than Aqab er Rejab, rode on, returning his glance to the ground after the manner of sheikhs who are pondering on affairs of state and high matters.

And after he had ridden on for ten minutes after passing the boy, the Sheikh urged his horse and cantered out away from his followers, calling one of his men, who was the chief of his trackers, to accompany him. And Sheikh Aqab er Rejab turned to that wise tracker Abood el Matrood, he who could tell from her tracks how many weeks a she-camel had been in foal, and he spoke to him and said: Ya Abood, cast your eyes on the ground and tell me what you see there written concerning the moon faced boy we passed not ten minutes ago.

And Abood el Matrood replied and said: O son of Rejab, I am astonished, for my eyes saw the form of a boy, yet these footprints are the footprints of a girl. For that is not the shape of a boy's foot, nor is this stride a boy's stride, and also this girl is very tired, nor is she used to walking barefoot.

Aqab spoke and said: Your thoughts are my thoughts, but let this remain a secret. Ride back to the girl, and offer her my hospitality for the night, for the sun is in the west and we must camp, and we are travellers and she is a traveller. Yet disclose not to her that we know her to be a girl.

Then while Abood el Matrood rode back to carry out the orders of the Sheikh, Aqab er Rejab halted his men and ordered them to pitch the black tents, and to prepare the evening meal. And Abood returned with Nura, and the Sheikh asked her: O comrade of the road, who are you and where are you going?

Nura replied and said: As for my name, it is Nuri, and I know not where I am going, for I am only a poor servant boy, and my master is imprisoned, and I seek refuge from oppression.

And when the great hair tent was pitched the Sheikh questioned Nura until she had related the whole story to him, only she pretended to be Sheikh Mizeil el Qurnachi's page boy rather than his daughter. And she said: As for Sheikh Mizeil's beautiful daughter, I know not what became of her. Perhaps she has thrown herself in the river to escape from shame.

And the Sheikh spoke and said: This affair shall be my affair, for I know Sheikh Mizeil's name, and I think there is some blood connection between us and that we are distant cousins, and does not the poet say:

A man has cousins,
They are like his wings.
Can then the hawk,
Fly without wings?

And when the food was eaten Sheikh Aqab ordered that the

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page boy be given a hair tent of his own to sleep in and he whispered to Abood el Matrood: Guard her well in the night.

Then the Sheikh sat in his own tent, thinking: How can I overcome the sequin seller and release Mizeil from the Turks, that I may earn the love of this girl? And by the time that the Star of Dawn was clear he had formed a plan. And when the first glow of dawn was in the East the Sheikh ordered the striking of the camp, and they took to the road, and as for their destination, it was Baghdad.

And on the morning of the second day the merchant Jassim rose from his bed and left his house and went to his shop as was his custom, and he called his assistants and slaves and shop boys and asked them and said: Have you yet found this runaway girl, daughter of the traitor Mizeil, and did you search for her throughout the night?

And they replied: Master, we have searched every quarter in Baghdad, yet we cannot find her. Yet there is a matter of which we desire to acquaint you, for it fills us with fear, and that is that last night after you had left the shop there came a man, and his face was hidden in his headcloth, and his tongue the tongue of the tribes, and he questioned us, asking: Is this the shop of the merchant Jassim? At what time does he come and at what time does he go? Where does he live and where does he eat? Where does he sit and where does he sleep?

And the merchant Jassim liked not the words of his servants.

After an hour or so spent in trade and profit Jassim left his shop and went to the coffee-house as was his custom, that he might meet his friends and pass half an hour in the pleasures of conversation. And when he rose from the coffee-shop to return to his shop he saw that the road was sprinkled with sequins, and the trail of sequins led back to his own shop. And he was amazed at what he saw, and he felt in his pockets, thinking: Perhaps I put a bag of sequins in my pocket, and they have leaked out and made this trail. But he felt in his pockets and there were no sequins there.

And at the time of noon he left his shop and went to his house, and while he was seated at his food his slave boy ran in and said: Master, your bag of sequins is leaking.

And Jassim went to the door of his house and he saw that a trail of sequins covered the path he had taken from his shop. So after he had fed and was satisfied, Jassim left his house, thinking: I will go to the river bank that I may see who is following me and sprinkling sequins behind me, for there is an open space, and I can look behind me.

So Jassim walked out by the river bank, and he kept glancing

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behind him, yet nobody was in sight. And he walked in a great circle through the palm trees, yet he saw no son of Adam. And while returning to the town he recrossed the path he had taken and saw that it was sprinkled with sequins. And when he saw this, he ran and ran back to the town and to his house, though he was a portly merchant.

And he went into his house and ordered his servants to bring him the dress of a woman, and they brought it, and he disguised himself, thinking: I will disguise myself as a woman and go to my brother's house and hide there, that I may escape from evil. And he came out of his house cloaked in a woman's cloak and veil, so that nobody could recognize him, and he walked to his brother's house at the other end of Baghdad, and knocked on the door and asked to see his brother. He was admitted and when he was in his brother's chamber he disclosed himself to him.

And while he was relating his situation to his brother there came a knock at the door and a servant cried out: Master, tell the old lady who is with you that her bag of sequins is leaking, for there is a trail of sequins leading right up to our threshold.

And Jassim was amazed at what he heard, for he knew not that he was being followed by Abood el Matrood, whom no disguise could fool, since he recognized people by their footprints on the ground.

Then Jassim and his brother ran out of the room and they saw that the words of the servant were true, for the threshold was sprinkled with sequins and a trail of sequins led away on the path taken by Jassim dressed as a woman. Then the brother turned to Jassim and said: Fear nothing and dread not death, for you will sleep here tonight and I will stay to guard you as you sleep with a drawn sword in my hand.

So when night came the brother of Jassim ordered all his servants to arm themselves and he posted them at the doors and windows of the house, so that not even a mouse could come in or go out. Then Jassim lay down to sleep on his brother's bed, and his brother stood on guard beside him with a drawn sword. And Jassim slept and his heart was free from fear. But in the morning when he awoke his heart stopped and he turned faint from very fear, for the sheets of the bed were sprinkled with sequins, and his brother lay dead on the floor in a great pool of blood, and the blood of his brother was spangled with sequins.

So Jassim leapt from his bed and he ran from the room and from the house dressed as he was in his dress of the night, and as he went out he saw that all the slaves and all sentries who had guarded the doors in the night lay dead in pools of blood, spangled

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with sequins. So Jassim ran from his brother's house through the streets of the City of Peace, nor was he aware that those in the streets and the common people glanced in surprise at the portly merchant running in his nightshirt.

So Jassim ran and ran, and his destination was his shop.

But as Jassim drew near his shop he saw a great crowd there collected and he heard much shouting and commotion, and as he came up to his shop puffing and panting and out of breath his shop assistants and boys and apprentices caught hold of him and cried: O you in whose footsteps fall sequins, give us our pay and release us and let us depart in peace, for we cannot serve one accursed.

And they led him into the shop, and he saw that the whole shop was sprinkled with sequins, and the watchman of the night lay dead in pools of blood, spangled with sequins, and on his great desk was a message in verse, written in Arabic and it read:

When Mizeil dies you die,
When Mizeil is saved, you are saved.

So Jassim dressed himself in suitable attire and he left his shop and he went to the house of the Commandant of the Ottoman Police, and he entered and saluted the officer and said: O Your Honour the Commandant, I have come to right a wrong and to replace injustice with justice. For I have discovered that I made a most foolish and careless mistake concerning Sheikh Mizeil el Qurnachi. He was not plotting sedition. Rather, he was praising the noble Ottoman Government and praying for the long life and prosperity of our lord, His Majesty the Caliph. Yet I mistook his words. So please show your famous clemency and mercy and release this gentle old sheikh.

But the Commandant of Police frowned and he spoke and his voice was lacking in mercy and he said: How can this be? For the date of execution of the treacherous sheikh is already fixed and ordained and reports have been made and submitted to high officers and ministers and even to the Caliph our Lord and Sultan concerning the plot which our watchful and vigilant police have detected and brought to light.

And Jassim replied and said: As for the noble old sheikh, he is indeed innocent. But there is a cloth merchant named Mizeil who was verily involved in the plot which Your Honour has detected, and his shop is near to my shop. Therefore let him be arrested and justice done, and this information is the true information. And as for me, pardon my carelessness and my error, for the names are similar, and though Your Honour has mentioned no punishment for me, yet I see that my mistake has caused trouble to Your Excellency, and I desire to punish myself. Therefore I go now to

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fetch one hundred thousand gold liras which I desire to pay you as a fine, for can carelessness go unpunished, should it inconvenience a high officer of state ?

So the Commandant agreed to the words of Jassim and he summoned an officer and ordered that Sheikh Mizeil el Qurnachi be released, and the traitor Mizeil the Merchant arrested and brought to justice.

So Sheikh Mizeil came out of the prison a free man, and he went to his house, and his daughter Nura joined him there. Yet her heart was sad, for she was filled with great love for the noble Sheikh Aqab er Rejab, and she thought: He thinks me a boy, therefore will he not desire me, and I cannot discover myself to him, for I am an honourable girl.

Therefore she was amazed and astonished when she saw a venerable official of great dignity come in state to her father, and her father, after conversation with the official, came to her and asked: Do you consent, O my eyes, to be taken in marriage by the noble Sheikh Aqab er Rejab, the father of a thousand swords ?

And Nura said to her father: I consent. And that night she went on to the roof of her house and she spoke to the moon and she said:

O Moon, you shine on youths and maidens.
I have a lover, there is One,
One who will love me with the strongest love.

And the moon smiled and did not hide behind a cloud.

The happiness and bliss of Nura and Aqab er Rejab, I cannot describe to you, for since you did not see them together you would not comprehend my words.

But as for the merchant Jassim, the Turks took from him all his wealth of gold, and chained him and took him to the House of the Mad.

* * *

VICE VERSA

The great composer, Liszt, is said to have called upon Rossini with a letter of introduction. Rossini asked him to play, listened politely, and when he was done, asked him what the piece was. Liszt said, " It is a march which I have written on the death of Meyerbeer. How do you like it ? "

" I like it very much," replied Rossini, " but I should have liked it much better if you had died and Meyerbeer had written the music."

Told by Professor Bergen Evans

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THE VISITATION

Four dozen buns a day — why, they'd be the laughing stock of the whole district!

by JOHN PUDNEY

"OH, Mother, Mother! Look at the elephant coming down the garden," cried Sally. Her mother was thinking just then, however, and disregarded Sally's remark. Her mother was thinking about possessions.

So Sally ran and opened the front door, ready to let the elephant in. She was thrilled at the unusual visitor; though, judging by her mother's reticence, she should not have shown excitement. She had rarely seen elephants. Though she was receiving a normal education, regular nourishment, and a proper home environment, her opportunities of seeing them were almost negligible.

Something had happened at last: she had always known that it would.

She opened the door wide and smiled. She heard the gentle, rather ponderous breathing and the muffled but eager tread. She was impressed by the physical dimensions. She noticed that the eyes were twinkling like raindrops.

"I'm your Uncle Arthur," said the elephant.

"Oh, Mother, Mother! The elephant that has come says that he is Uncle Arthur!"

There was no reply. Her mother must be thinking. How rude. Sally smiled at the visitor who was standing patiently upon the threshold, completely filling it. Then she put her head round the sitting room door and interrupted her mother's thoughts.

"He says he's Uncle Arthur," she said.

"Who does?" asked Mrs. Albion.

"Sh!" Sally made a polite gesture. "The elephant."

"What elephant, Sally?" Her mother looked cross.

"The elephant I told you about, who has just called."

"Sally! Come right in." Mother was wasting time, but she was very cross. "Now tell me: who is at the door?"

"Uncle Arthur."

Mrs. Albion winced. The child was imaginative, of course, that was the danger—a misfortune, in fact. *Uncle Arthur.* "I'll go to the door myself," she said.

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They found the elephant wedged. Mrs. Albion screamed. Sally felt sorry for him, and frightened. He was stuck fast, more in than out.

"Help!" cried Mrs. Albion. "A zoo's escaped. Help! We shall be trampled underfoot!"

"Oh, Mother! He's terribly stuck. What can we do for him?"

"Come away, Sally. Quick! Run round to the Bridies and telephone. Call the police—and its keeper. I'll come with you. What a horrid great ugly brute!" For a moment she hesitated, to convince herself that he was wedged. She snatched an umbrella from the hall stand. She was outraged—she would defend her home.

She had half turned towards the back door when she heard the kindly voice of the elephant again: "I'm your Uncle Arthur."

Mrs. Albion stopped. It was all very well for Sally, who was an imaginative child, to see elephants and hear them talk, but she was proud of the fact that she herself was practical. She had never heard elephants talk. She disbelieved them. There was no doubt, however, that an elephant was wedged in her front door.

"I'm your Uncle Arthur," he repeated.

A grey fear then enveloped her. When the Albions feared, it was grey and bleak in the house, like a November fog outside in the streets. The sitting room sweated an emulsion of mistrust from its scrolled, crenellated and patterned contents. The hall stand wilted in abject submission: the stairs looked weak and rickety at the first fearful thought. Then Mrs. Albion, in a grey voice, addressed the elephant.

"Will you repeat that, please?" she said through clenched teeth. She was desperate. One thought had taken the place of all others. It was a legend in the family that Uncle Arthur—whose uncle he was had never been clear—had been sent to prison for a long term, convicted of an unmentionable crime. That thought alone induced Mrs. Albion to address the elephant.

"He's said it twice, Mother," cried Sally, "and he must be terribly uncomfortable . . ."

"Quiet, Sally! I wish him to repeat that remark."

The elephant eased his position. He regretted his haste in accepting Sally's invitation to come in. "I'm your Uncle Arthur," he repeated with some lack of enthusiasm. But Sally clapped her hands and danced round in front of him.

"I'm Sally!" she cried. "Little Sally!" Her voice rang out bravely against the grey pallor of the hall. The bead curtains danced with her.

"But this is absurd. What will the neighbours think? Stop dancing, Sally! Go and play quietly out in the garden." Mrs.

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Albion slammed the umbrella into the wickerwork stand. Her worst fears were realized, though she was satisfied now that she was in no danger of physical attack. " And Sally ! Not a word of this, mind. If the Bridie children are nosey, you had better ignore them. Now, out you go, and let me think in peace."

" Goodbye, Uncle Arthur ! " She ran out into the cold afternoon sunshine. How rude Mother had been. Uncle Arthur was standing there so meekly. Probably he was most uncomfortable, too. The least one could have done would have been to offer him a bun. Sally was a kind, sweet tempered child, in spite of Mrs. Albion's vigilance. It took more than a church-going mother and her rigid interpretations of truth to discover, much less disturb, the child's convictions. Sally had always believed that an amazing event would happen one wet afternoon. Hundreds of times she had imagined visitors such as Uncle Arthur appearing at the front door. Now it had happened, quite suddenly. A new truth had been added to life.

While Mother was trying to fit the visitor into the anxious interior of *The Croft*, she would run out of the " Tradesmen Only " and buy him a bun—or two, for there was four pence in her money-box. She was not afraid of Uncle Arthur being sent away, because there had been undeniable anxiety in her mother's voice. It meant that the front door must be shut at once, before the Starks, from opposite, saw in. Besides, Uncle Arthur was wedged more in than out. It would be a job to get him out again.

So Sally skipped off through the " Tradesmen Only ", and ran to the baker's shop, ignoring the Bridie children who called after her at the corner.

Mrs. Albion stood alone with the elephant in the frightened house. She was trying to calculate.

It was more difficult than calculating the hire-purchase terms of a mahogany radiogram—like the Bridies', only better : more difficult than finding the money for the motor car insurance—the Starks had only a three-wheeler.

Mrs. Albion was trying to calculate the exact dimensions of the rumour she remembered hearing in family circles concerning Uncle Arthur and his unmentionable crime. It had not been mentioned for ten years. Mr. Albion always declared, looking down his nose, that there were ugly things in many families which never need come to light if they were never mentioned in any circumstances. One must never take a risk with a thing like that, he had said. It led to loss of prestige, goodwill, and—inevitably—clientele.

And then, of course, there were the neighbours. Look at Mrs. Carver, when her sister was divorced. She was hardly able to go out of the house : and everyone sent her anonymous letters. Mrs.

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Albion turned over in her grey-curtained mind the words " I'm your Uncle Arthur." There was something sinister, something irrevocably destructive, about them. From an elephant, too.

She was now satisfied that the patient beast that stood in front of her had said these words, and might say them again. She had heard, too, of elephants trumpeting, particularly when cornered. There was no time to be lost. The Bridies, the Starks, or—heaven forbid !—one of the snooty Miss Carvers, might at any moment pass, and, looking through the laurels, see the elephant. Worse still, they might hear him repeat his declaration.

" Come in," she said, " if you must. I'll put you into the conservatory till Mr. Albion comes home from work."

Wherever he had come from, Uncle Arthur could never have encountered a less gracious invitation. The front door was pressed right back on its hinges as he strained to squeeze his hindquarters through. Mrs. Albion, her hands clumsy with fear and disgust, fretted with the bead curtains, and opened invitingly wide the double doors leading to the conservatory.

It was lucky that for privacy Mr. Albion had whitewashed the conservatory glass. At one time the neighbours had seemed to live upon the doorstep of the sitting room which could be seen through the glass. Mr. Albion had determined that there were limits to neighbourliness : there was a point when you must keep yourself to yourself. That determination, Mrs. Albion reflected, had arisen at the time he had become junior churchwarden. Now the whitened panes were to succour them in a situation which might imperil the very foundations of life at *The Croft.*

It showed, in a way, how guidance, and a little common sense, sometimes followed services unstintingly given : services which, at the time of their being offered to Mr. Albion, were considered to be of questionable value, as the Carvers were the only people in the road who went to church, and they alone were witness to the dignity of his duties.

Mrs. Albion sighed. There were no plants in the conservatory ; nothing but a few gardening tools and Sally's doll's pram. She quickly moved these to one side. The elephant was still straining at the front door. Every moment jeopardized her position.

The latter end of that elephant writhing in her front door would give rise to endless rumour and speculation were any of the neighbours or the tradesmen to catch sight of it. Sooner or later Uncle Arthur's name would be mentioned.

No. Emergency action was necessary. Her own hat hung upon the kitchen door. In another moment she had withdrawn one of its pins and was out through the " Tradesmen Only ". There she met Sally carrying her little bag of buns.

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" Oh, Mother, what are you going to do ? " cried Sally, waving her bag. " Oh, Mother, I am excited ! "

" Sh-sh ! Remember what I told you about keeping this to yourself. You'd better stay quietly in the kitchen till I call you."

" But you're not going to hurt Uncle Arthur with that pin ? "

" Be quiet and mind your own business." Mrs. Albion's voice swept through the shrubberies like the grey wind.

" Shan't ! " cried Sally defiantly. The shrubberies were lit with tinsel, like Christmas trees. The " Tradesmen Only " swung musically upon its hinges, twinkling with iridescent red like a huge garnet brooch. Uncle Arthur was just round the corner !

" What, Sally ! " Mrs. Albion, half stifled by the heavy air of the frightened shrubberies, was suddenly at a loss for words. She turned quickly and ran to the front door, from which the straining bulk of the elephant's haunches still protruded. All was lost if anyone should see her now, or overhear the cries of Sally. She staked her all on the efficacy of the hatpin, which she jabbed into a soft part of the great mammal that was inflicting such terror upon her home.

Immediately there was a roar, and the next moment the elephant was inside the house. With the voice of a church organ he emitted peal upon peal of sound.

" I'm your Uncle Arthur—Ouh ! " he trumpeted. " I'm your Uncle Arthur—Ouh ! " Mrs. Albion slammed the door after him. He went through the hall into the conservatory. But he continued to cry out. The neighbours could hardly fail to hear those cries from the conservatory. The elephant sat down on the place where she had jabbed him.

" Can't you be quiet now ? " shouted Mrs. Albion.

The trumpetings continued.

What have we done, thought Mrs. Albion, that we should have been visited in this way ? She thought of a dozen mean things she had done during the last few weeks. Not one of them seemed to justify the visitation of an elephant.

The trumpeting filled the house. The glass of the conservatory rattled. Sally came running in from the kitchen. Mrs. Albion made as if to slap her daughter for disobedience, for spending her pocket money, and because she was afraid to slap the elephant. But Sally was too quick for her.

" Poor Uncle Arthur," she cried, going into the conservatory. " But look what I've brought for you. Buns ! "

The trumpeting ceased.

With a benign expression, Uncle Arthur reached out his trunk and took the buns. He was satisfied : he liked buns. " Run round to the baker's and get half a dozen more, Sally. Here's a shilling." Mrs. Albion did not hide her relief. Six buns, though extravagant,

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was not an impossible price to pay for security, till Mr. Albion came home from work. " And if you meet anybody, and they ask you what the noise was, say it was the wireless."

" Don't go and hurt him again while I'm gone, Mother. It's going to be such fun having him." The colours and shapes of a tropical jungle danced in profusion around her as she passed up the few yards of drive to the front gate. The late afternoon light which laved the tidy avenue in pungent ordinariness, swirled about her in magical effulgence.

Something had happened. The avenue, the drive, the front door, the wicker hat stand, and, most of all, the whitewashed conservatory, would never be the same again. An elephant had come.

" Sally, dear ! " Mrs. Bridie leaned over her gate. " Are you all right at home ? We thought we heard such a funny sound . . ."

" Mother says it's our wireless." Nobody could tell an untruth and be aware of the glory of the afternoon.

" Oh, a *new* wireless ? " Mrs. Bridie felt that she had not been kept abreast with local affairs. Sally skipped on towards the baker's. Even her father passed unnoticed. Uncle Arthur will have had eight buns, she thought. How satisfied he will feel.

But all was not well at *The Croft*.

Mr. Albion on his return from business, had not expected to find his wife conversing with an elephant.

" You had no business to come here," she was saying. " I don't care whether you starve or what happens. I'm not going to be made the talk, and, of course, the laughing stock of the whole avenue . . . " Mr. Albion stood still. It was not an elephant : it couldn't be.

" What *are* you talking about ? " he asked, ignoring the elephant.

" Can't you see ? " snapped Mrs. Albion.

" Yes," he said, relieved that she saw it too. " An elephant."

" I should think it *is* an elephant."

" But what made you get it ? " Mr. Albion was losing his self control. All things considered his business reputation his authority, his office in the church . . .

" It came. It walked in." Hysterically she turned again to address the elephant. " I don't care whether you say you're Uncle Arthur, or not . . "

" I am your Uncle Arthur," said the elephant.

Mrs. Albion faced her husband as she would have faced death. There was no pride or arrogance or even cunning left in her demeanour. She looked sallow, rutted with anxiety : and all the Albions' fears emerged from their hiding places behind the bead curtains.

" Does anyone know ? " said Mr. Albion at last.

" Only Sally."

" Where is she ? "

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" Buying buns."

Mr. Albion glared. Buns on Sundays, yes—but on weekdays it was just the kind of extravagance he was determined to put down. His small anger vented his huge quaking fear. " Why buns? " he roared.

" For the elephant."

Mrs. Albion's words laid him like ashes. Nobody spoke till Sally returned. Nobody answered when she asked if she should give Uncle Arthur the buns. They watched her feed a shillingsworth of buns to the elephant. Then Mr. Albion announced he would speak to the elephant alone. The legend about Uncle Arthur's crime had been unmentionable.

When they had gone, he lit the gas and questioned the elephant for an hour. He asked every question that a careful businessman could ask an elephant. There was no reply at all. Then, looking closely at his visitor, he noticed that the small eyes were closed. The elephant was asleep.

That night, the Albions came to the most critical decision of their lives; they decided to keep Uncle Arthur concealed in the conservatory. It was the only safe course. With constant attention and vigilance they would be able to protect themselves from a danger which both agreed would destroy those virtues more precious than life itself, the respect of their neighbours, financial stability, and the support of the church. In the course of time the elephant might be induced to explain himself.

" Shall I buy some more buns for Uncle Arthur ? " said Sally at breakfast.

" Yes, dear. Run and get half a dozen more."

With the shilling warm in her hand, Sally ran out into the bright new morning.

" What, more buns ? " said the baker's wife. " You are a hungry girl, Sally."

" We shall need plenty of buns just now," replied Sally, with joy in her voice which the baker's wife failed to understand.

Plenty of buns were needed at *The Croft*.

During the next fortnight they tried every form of food, from dog biscuits to rice pudding. Uncle Arthur disliked them all. With anything but buns he grew restless, muttering to himself, and threatening to trumpet as he had done when Mrs. Albion jabbed him. He needed plenty of buns. It varied from three to four dozen. It was no good running and buying them by the bag. They were sent round by special delivery.

" And the more buns they has," said the baker's wife to Mrs. Bridie, " the thinner they gets. Like a pair of shadows, though Sally don't seem to suffer . . ."

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Mrs. Bridie nodded. "I shouldn't wonder," she said, "if there's not something going on. Just what it is, I can't get at . . ."

Everybody suspected something, but nobody suspected that the Albions were keeping an elephant.

Uncle Arthur said very little for three weeks, but he seemed to think his own thoughts, not snatchily as Sally had seen her mother think about possessions, but rhythmically like rain on wet afternoons. He was a pleasure to watch.

Mr. Albion took to sitting by the conservatory door in the evenings, at first in order to carry on interrogation, but later because he, too, found pleasure in watching Uncle Arthur think. Sometimes he caught himself thinking himself; and one evening he read a book to Sally and the elephant.

Mrs. Albion did not join them until a week or so later, when the intensity of local gossip drove her out of the sitting room. They gave up lighting the gas in there because people were always calling on some pretext or other, and casually mentioning the subject of buns.

Three to four dozen buns a day for three people!

Every other evening one of the Miss Carvers would call to see if her cat had strayed. Young Stark would pop in to borrow insulating tape. The Bridies—any pretext was enough for them.

Mrs. Albion became much kindlier when she met them all in the street, however: and everyone agreed that Sally was radiant. Sally had lost her spots: and that couldn't be buns.

Mrs. Albion found that sitting with Uncle Arthur calmed her. Sometimes she held Sally's hand and sometimes when they were all sitting round together she sang rather sentimental songs. The bead curtains clicked merrily and Uncle Arthur's eyes twinkled.

Except for the expense of buying buns, fears and anxieties vanished from the Albions' home. They had sold the car and sold the wireless set, and were wondering what to give Uncle Arthur for Christmas, when they realized that they had very little money left.

"Though we shall always be quite happy on what I earn," beamed Mr. Albion.

"I think it's time Uncle Arthur worked for his living, too," said Sally. "I'll tell him there's no more buns."

"He's a lazy old thing, bless him," sighed Mrs. Albion. "It's a pity he costs us so much in buns; but then, I must say I don't grudge it."

That night Sally told the elephant that there were no more buns when she went to kiss him good night. They all laughed when she said it. They wondered if it would make him think of something new to say. But he thought ponderously that evening and went to sleep early.

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In the morning he had gone.

" How he went through that door beats me ! " muttered Albion.

" We shall have to tell the baker not to send the buns," sighed Mrs. Albion.

Sally cried a little at first. But the world had not changed : it was still full of surprises. Something had happened. They bought her a small grey toy elephant for Christmas. But her father and mother laughed more often now, and they all agreed that the toy was not a good substitute for Uncle Arthur, so they burned it.

In the avenue and round the corner, the inhabitants discussed the Albions' order for buns, whenever more than one of them was gathered together. Its sudden cessation did nothing to diminish speculation. It gave the story a finality which added to its relish.

They discuss it still : and if the Albions overhear them, they just laugh.

* * *

ANSWERS to A MAN'S BEST FRIEND on page 60

1. *The Dormouse, who went to sleep in the teapot at the Mad Hatter's tea party, in "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland," by Lewis Carroll.*
2. *Ferdinand the bull, in " Ferdinand," by Munro Leaf.*
3. *Archy the cockroach, in " archy s life of mehitabel," by Don Marquis.*
4. *Orlando the Marmalade Cat, in " Orlando Keeps A Dog," by Kathleen Hale.*
5. *Chauntecleer, in the tale of the cock and the fox, in " The Nun's Priest's Tale," by Geoffrey Chaucer.*
6. *The Frog, in " The Bad Child's Book of Beasts," by Hilaire Belloc.*
7. *The cat, in Thomas Gray's ode " On a Favourite Cat, Drowned in a Tub of Gold Fishes."*
8. *The calendar's horse, in " The Diverting History of John Gilpin," by William Cowper.*
9. *The dog, in " The Little Dog's Day," by Rupert Brooke.*
10. *The ducks, in Kenneth Grahame's poem of that title.*

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FINE FEATHERS

We are all Adam's children, but silk makes all the difference

THOMAS FULLER, 1608-1661, *Gnomologia*

O my God, to still my longing,
Give to me a mantle fine,
Gaily trimmed with metal buttons
In the golden light to shine.

Grant me, too, a goodly wife,
In her jacket, clean and neat,
Arms of slender willow grace,
Flowerlike beauty in her feet.

Laughing eyes, like seed of grape,
Shapely shoulders, like white bread,
Lips as fresh as buds that burst
Into shining blossoms red.

Transylvanian Gypsy Song, Author unknown

A Good Time Had

Before the enormous amber-coloured bath, the amber-tinted mirrors—the oiled-silk curtains and innumerable shiny gadgets—Cluny was bereft of speech. She gazed and gazed, till her eyes were like pools of ink.

" Nice ? " prompted the owner.

" Heaven ! " breathed Cluny.

" I like it too," said Mr. Ames, " though my friends say it suggests a love-nest." He made a practice of introducing this term into conversation with new young women, to see their reaction. Cluny's was unexpected.

" I do wish Uncle Arn was here ! "

Slightly jarred, Mr. Ames asked why Uncle Arn.

" Being a plumber," explained Cluny. With a professional air she examined the taps, the waste, the snakey handshower ; the yellow rubber cushions and fish-shaped ashtray aroused an emotion more purely æsthetic. Laying the silkiness of the curtains against her cheek, she almost purred. " It's as good as the films ! " she sighed at last. " Can I really wash here ? "

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" Of course you can. Have a bath," said Mr. Ames. He lit a cigarette while Cluny considered.

In the Porrit-Trumper circles of her upbringing one did not take baths as lightly as that. One planned them ahead, with due regard to when the boiler would be on, and who else wanted one; above all, after bathing, one assumed clean underwear. Cluny naturally had no change of linen with her, and this put her off. She also felt she could have almost as good a time in the hand-basin.

" I'll just wash," she said. " But thank you all the same."

There was no key in the lock, but this did not worry her, because of course Mr. Ames knew she was inside; removing the upper part of her dress, Cluny sluiced herself vigorously in the lovely hot water and worked up a glorious lather of geranium-scented soap. (Mr. Ames, quietly re-opening the door, saw nothing of her but her long, thin, ivory-coloured back; and Cluny, her eyes full of suds, did not see Mr. Ames.) The sweet spicy scent enchanted her, it easily overrode the last of the cabbage water, and she readjusted her dress with well-founded complacency. Her nose was of course shiny again, but by fortunate chance the toilet appliances included a large bowl of powder. Cluny was never one to spoil the ship for a ha'porth of tar. When she returned to the studio Mr. Ames, mixing cocktails, smelt her before he saw her.

MARGERY SHARP, *Cluny Brown*

Mighty Pretty

By and by the King and Queene, who looked in this dress—a white laced waistcoate and a crimson short pettycoate, and her hair dressed à la négligence—mighty pretty; and the King rode hand in hand with her . . . I followed them up into White Hall, and into the Queene's presence, where all the ladies walked, talking and fiddling with their hats and feathers, and changing and trying one another's by one another's heads, and laughing. But it was the finest sight to me, considering their great beautys, and dress, that ever I did see in all my life. But, above all, Mrs. Stewart in this dresse, with her hat cocked and a red plume, with her sweet eye, little Roman nose, and excellent taille, is now the greatest beauty I ever saw, I think in my life . . .

SAMUEL PEPYS, 1633-1703, *Diary*

Hey Dilly Dilly!

A stick dressed up does not look like a stick.

CERVANTES, 1547-1616, *Don Quixote*

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Red Star Rising

no bells and pink
ribbons for me
archy it is me for
the life romantic i could
walk right into
that cat show and get
away with it
archy none of those
maltese princesses had
anything on me in the
way of hauteur
or birth either or any
of the aristocratic
fixings and condiments
that mark the
cats of lady clara
vere de vere but
it bores me archy
me for the
wide open spaces the
alley serenade and
the moonlight
sonata on the back
fences when
the red star
calls to my blood
none of your
pretty puss stuff for
mehitabel it would
give me a grouch
to have to be so
solemn toujours
gai archy toujours
gai is my
motto

DON MARQUIS, *archy s life of mehitabel*

Envoi

I for one venerate a petticoat.

GEORGE, LORD BYRON, 1788-1824

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CURVE OF SEARCH

A pretty theory on paper, thought the commodore — but would it work?

by THOMAS WOODROOFFE

THE chief yeoman replaced the shore telephone receiver, scratched his head doubtfully as he read through the message he had just taken down; then, with pad and pencil, his telescope tucked under his left arm, he walked round the lower bridge to give a discreet knock at the charthouse door.

He knew that the navigating officer's golfing opponent had let him down at the last moment, which was the sole reason why that officer was now engaged upon the deadly occupation of getting his chart corrections up to date. As the navigator leaned over "Portland to Owers", dreaming of the time he got a three at the long fourteenth at Came Down, he was interrupted by the gentle tapping on the door.

"Yes, Chief Yeoman, what is it?" he asked from the centre of a billowing cloud of smoke. He was lighting a pipeful of his special mixture which he always had posted to him from a tobacconist in the Haymarket.

"This position, sir, please. Can you let me know where it is before I take the signal down aft?" The chief yeoman had got as far as reading out the latitude.

"Position? What position?" puff puff. "All right, then, let's have a look at it." The navigator held out his hand for the pad.

"Haven't shown it to the commodore yet, sir," replied the chief yeoman, surrendering the signal with reluctance.

"Never mind him just yet. From the Navy Office, Wellington, eh?" The navigator whistled. Then pulling another chart out of the top drawer he got busy with parallel ruler and dividers, making disjointed comments to himself in a sing-song voice as if the chief yeoman were not there. "Sighted here three days ago, was he?—So this other chap says—mmm—doesn't mean a damn thing—If I know fishing boats, that position is degrees out—and New Zealand trawlers are probably worse—and how far has she drifted—mmm—? Well—let's see, now." He twirled his dividers across the chart. Then he turned to the chief yeoman, who had been patiently contemplating the beams overhead during this monologue. "Between the Chatham Islands and Wellington, somewhere; or, about two

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hundred miles sou'east of us here at Auckland—there, I've written it on the signal. But where she is now, God knows." He handed back the pad. "And, Chief Yeoman, tell the commodore I'll be down in two shakes of a duck's tail, and you might send the quartermaster up to me with the Deck Log."

Thanking him politely, the chief yeoman trotted sideways down the bridge ladder with rather more than his usual air of omniscience, brushed importantly through a somnolent training class clustered round No. 3 gun, and made his way along the fore and aft bridge to the quarterdeck.

"Wassup, then, Chieffie?" The quartermaster diverted his attention from a seagull on one of the jetty bollards to the yeoman studying the names on the officer's board.

"You'll find out," replied the yeoman, who objected to being addressed as "Chieffie" by a mere leading seaman, "but if you're in a real hurry to know," he continued, with his eye at the 'on board' against the name of the engineer commander, "nip up to the charthouse with the Deck Log. Navigating officer wants it chop-chop—he'll give you news if you asks 'im nicely."

The chief yeoman paused long enough before knocking at the commodore's door to compose his features into an expression of intelligent anticipation, like a dog waiting for a ball to be thrown, which he invariably assumed in the presence of the great.

". . . Taking it all round," the commodore was writing to his wife in Hampshire, "our annual programme makes me feel a bit like Queen Victoria alternating inflexibly between Osborne and Balmoral. Out here, it's Wellington in November for musketry, Auckland at Christmas for the summer race meeting and so on. Nothing ever seems to—"

He placed the blotting-paper carefully over his letter at the interruption.

"Signal from the Navy Office, Wellington, sir, please." The chief yeoman was gabbling on before the commodore had so much as glanced at the pad before him. "Navigating officer's coming down directly and the engineer commander is on board, sir. Shall I give him a sha—" —here he quickly corrected himself—"give him the word I mean, sir, that you wish to see him? The surgeon comm—"

"Just a minute, just a minute." The commodore did not like to be hurried. His eyebrows went up as he read that a steam fishing-boat with thirty men on board had run out of coal on her way from Chatham Islands to Wellington, and had last been seen drifting helplessly in a heavy sea. From available information she would soon be short of food and water.

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The commodore pulled at his nose, a trick of his when puzzled, of which not even his wife had been able to cure him.

" Yes, yes, any officers ashore ? " He looked up at the chief yeoman impatiently tapping a pencil against the seam of his trousers.

" Only the surgeon commander, sir—lecturing over at the university on tropical diseases—lecture finishes at three fifteen, sir."

" Better have him recalled. And ask the engineer commander to speak to me, please."

Having repeated these orders under his breath, the chief yeoman disappeared in full cry.

" Little perisher's bang off any traffic route, sir," the navigator bustled in with a rolled-up chart under his arm, " not a snowball's chance of being sighted by any decent sized ship. And at full speed we could get to her area long before anybody in Wellington—and there's nothing there, anyhow, which could take on this job. Just let me show you, sir."

He unrolled the chart on the large mahogany dining table and as they leaned over it together their voices became a vague rumble, quite unintelligible to the commodore's valet who was fitting studs into an evening shirt with the door of the sleeping cabin left hopefully open.

The pilot was explaining that the Auckland weather people had just told him over the 'phone that the wind had veered since she'd first been sighted and that it was now blowing a gale from the northward—" and if they're right, well, there's nothing to stop her till "—and he pointed dramatically to a wavy line at the bottom of the chart marked ' Northern limit of Pack Ice.' " If she hasn't foundered already," he ended, popping his pencil back into his breast pocket.

" And even if she hasn't," the commodore added gloomily, pulling at his nose, " it'll be like looking for a needle in a haystack."

" Given a bit of luck and if one or two guesses are not too far off the mark, I reckon that at full speed we should be somewhere near round about eight o'clock in the morning—sailing at four, I take it, sir ? " And the pilot made his way back to the bridge, humming a cheerful little tune.

Although not a word had been given out, pretty nearly the whole ship knew by this time that something was in the wind. The signs were too many for the old hands to miss : the navigator hopping to and fro with his charts ; or the chief abroad in mid-afternoon wearing his engine room gloves—and even more significant—ordering himself an early tea when his shoregoing clothes had not been laid out.

To anyone who had been at sea for more than a dog watch all these added up to the same thing. " Going to sea, teatime, wouldn't

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wonder," the chief bo's'n's mate remarked out of the side of his mouth to the captain of the fo'c'sle, who at once knocked his hands off painting the breakwater and put them to securing loose gear instead. The chief quartermaster, without being sent for, popped his head in at the charthouse to ask if he should start the master gyro; while Mr. Simmonds sent word up to the wardroom galley that it would be supper this evening instead of dinner.

Perhaps the gunnery training class was a bit surprised when it suddenly found itself furling the quarterdeck awning, but apart from them, everyone else seemed to accept it as a matter of course when the ship prepared for sea after "Stand Easy," and were only mildly interested when the commander told them at "Both Watches" that the ship was going out to search for a helpless fishing boat.

At ten minutes to four the surgeon commander stepped on to the quarterdeck; at five to, the motorboat was clear of the water; at four o'clock the cruiser slipped from the jetty, and at five past, when she was headed down harbour, the ship's company was piped to tea.

"Leading seaman, leading seaman!" a youngster on the training division's messdeck clamoured shrilly for attention, "if they don't know where she is, how are we going to find her?"

"We'll find 'er all right," the instructor, who hadn't the foggiest idea, tried to soothe him, "no need ter fret yerself. We'll come up with 'er in the mornin', see if we don't."

But his questioner was not to be put off like this. "Yes, but how?" he bellowed above the clatter of twenty eight boys and ordinary seamen wolfing bread and jam, "no one knows where she is, Commander said, and she's got no wireless."

"Never you mind 'ow, Smartie. Wot d'yer think we got a navigator for? An' why did they give 'im that there medal in the war?" The instructor was getting back into his depth. "Yer don't know, I make so bold as ter suppose? Well, I'll tell yer." It had been awarded for gallantry on the beaches of Gallipoli. "For findin' the German fleet during thick weather in the 'Eligoland Bight. That's for why. Just yer watch our navigatin' commander."

The ordinary seaman, who was no fool, observing that the ears of his instructor were beginning to turn red, swallowed another enormous mouthful and relapsed into a thoughtful silence.

The same question was being asked up on the forebridge where the commodore was beset by similar misgivings. As the ship worked up to full speed on her way down the gulf, wave crests caught the curve of the bow and a shower of spray would come whipping across the forecastle and now and then a few drops would get as far as the bridge dodger. The officer of the watch sent down for his oilskin.

"But tell me, Pilot," the commodore was saying as he stared at

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the low-lying shore away to starboard, "just how do you propose to find her?"

"Our old friend Vignot's Curve, sir," the pilot answered jauntily, "or the Curve of Search, if you prefer it—a simple problem in interception, assuming that we have made some fairly accurate guesses." And then, deciding from the look on the commodore's face that he needed reassuring, he went on, "But perhaps I could explain better, sir, if you cared to come to the charthouse and see how I worked it out."

He switched on the light over the table and spread out a diagram which vaguely reminded the commodore of part of a spider's web.

"I've assumed, sir," the pilot began, using his dividers as a pointer, "that she must be drifting down on some course between these two lines as the outside limits"—he indicated the legs of a large V—"so that at five a.m., which is about the earliest we'll be able to see anything, she could be anywhere on this arc"—he twiddled his dividers—"I'm only giving her a speed of about a knot, so at six she'll be on this line, at seven here, at eight down here, and so on. These darker lines are us, sir. Give us a speed of twenty one—no, better make it twenty in this sea,"—with a glance out of the scuttle—"and on the hour, we intersect at this line of points. Join 'em up, lay off the courses between 'em and there's your curve of search. All we have to do is alter course every hour and we're bound to catch her eventually, sir."

The navigator started to fill his pipe, a complicated operation which involved screwing up the tobacco into a little globular package, then fitting this delicately into the bowl. For a time the commodore watched him, fascinated.

"Yes, Pilot, that all looks very pretty on paper," he objected after a few moments, "but have you ever known the damn thing to work in practice—outside the Navigation School, I mean?"

"What's that? Good Lord, yes, sir. Why, we picked up a Hun off the Plate, when I was in the old *Euryalus* at the start of the war, as neat as you please. Got tipped the wink when she sailed by our Consul at B.A. in a garbled wireless message, but we caught him a treat, sir. Three thousand-ton tramp, he was, too."

He carefully punctured the paper round the tobacco with the blunt end of a match and lit his pipe. "If we steer 160° after rounding East Cape, sir, we should get on to our curve at five, and if our luck's in we ought to be throwing the little beggar a heaving line by eight o'clock."

"And I shall be pleasurably surprised if we are, Pilot." The commodore, being an old gunnery man, distrusted people who had specialized in anything else. He informed his navigating officer that

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he was now going down for a bath and would be dining aft, after which he would pray for a miracle to happen.

"Bow and steaming lights burning brightly, sir, please—oil lamps placed." A gruff voice broke the thread of his musing as the officer of the watch stared out over a darkening sea.

"Thank you, Hendy. Better see there's nothing sculling about the upper deck—looks as if we'll be washing down before we're much older." A breaking sea gave an angry hiss as it went racing down the port side, almost level with the bridge—or so it seemed in the fading light.

For the first part of the night the cruiser drove into a fresh northerly gale on her bow. When she dived into a sea she staggered as if she had struck; a thud-thud-thud of her propellers as their tips neared the surface came from aft, then with a lurch and a long shudder her bows would lift clear, only to go through the whole performance again a few seconds later.

As the successive seas had thundered down on to her forecastle, water which had seeped past the plugs in the navel pipes washed sluggishly from side to side of the capstan flat. A man in his hammock on the seamen's messdeck slumbered on peacefully though a naked electric light bulb, whose shade had been jerked off, shone straight on to his eyes.

Down aft, when she waggled her tail, a jumble of hairbrushes, books and photographs in silver frames slithered about the carpets of the officers' cabins. Forward and aft, an unpleasant stale fug permeated the ship between decks. But above the creak of her straining and the chatter of the ventilating fans, the steady hum of the turbines never varied and the dawn disclosed a confused and lumpy sea.

"Dismal bloody outlook." The navigator tucked the old piece of towel more firmly into the collar of his oilskin. "Wouldn't be in that perishing trawler for much."

He and the officer of the watch ducked suddenly as the wind caught the water cascading off the bows to lift a shower of spray over the bridge. "Wonder where she is—full to the coamings with fish and no freezing machine—must remember to keep windward of her, she'll be stinking soon."

He took another quick look round the horizon through his glasses. "Sweet Fanny Adams, so far! Just hold on till I've had my cup of tea in the charthouse, then you might call the commodore. I want to alter at five. We'll be starting on the first leg of the curve then, tell him."

As he had a perfect right to do at five o'clock of a blustering

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chilly morning, the commodore, apart from his initial "Good morning," kept his thoughts to himself. When the time for altering course approached at each hour, the trio on the bridge hopefully searched the endless succession of slate-grey furrows with their glasses, but the helm went over at five, and again at six with nothing to relieve the monotony. At seven the sea was flooded suddenly with colour and every now and again one of the three would put his glasses quickly to his eyes, thinking he had seen a flash from a distant open boat—but always it was the white of a breaking sea caught for a second in the sun.

At a quarter to eight the commodore snatched a hurried breakfast in his sea cabin, standing up, because the sea being now very nearly dead astern, the cruiser was rolling heavily. He was back again for the alteration at eight, when the navigator lit his second pipe of the morning.

"Do you think we're doing any good, going along as we are?" the commodore asked him at half past eight. "Shouldn't we try in some new direction altogether? After all, your guesses may have been a bit out."

"Well, sir, I could make a large alteration to port, if you feel like it and try a wide cast to the northward, sir."

"Better have a go at that, perhaps," the commodore grunted.

The navigator steadied himself with one hand round the compass bowl and leaned down over the voice-pipe.

"Starboard fifteen!"

"Starboard fifteen, sir," came up from the quartermaster, and her head began to swing slowly round to port.

The pilot was watching the compass card, the officer of the watch had taken the time, when a distant mournful hail came from the masthead look-out.

"Object fine on the starboard bow, sir."

"Object," shouted the officer of the watch up the masthead voice-pipe, "what kind of an object? Does it look like a ship or a sea serpent?"

"Only catch sight of her, sir, when we're both on top of a sea together—just for a second—there she is again, sir—it's a ship, I think, sir."

"I'll bring her round, sir." The pilot had suddenly recovered his jauntiness and he was the first to sight her through his glasses.

"That's our little blighter, all right, sir, and she doesn't seem to have spotted us yet. What about firing a signal light to wake them up?" The pilot rubbed his hands together gleefully and shouted for a signalman.

"Well done, Pilot." The commodore looked away from his

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glasses. " And we were just going to alter right away from her, too—might have missed her altogether."

" Well, sir, I said eight o'clock and we picked her up thirty seven minutes late—smart look-out that, get his name officer of the watch."

" Ordinary Seaman Ballard, sir, a New Zealand rating."

" Should get a gold watch, that youngster, suitably engraved by a grateful Harbour Board, or owners, or somebody. It always used to be a gold watch, or at least a pair of binoculars in my young days."

This was their ship, all right, a dirty little trawler with her funnel white with brine and her ensign upside down as a signal of distress.

" Fat lot of good that would've done 'em out here, if we hadn't turned up," observed the pilot. " Messenger! Nip down to the wardroom messman and tell him I want my breakfast in twenty minutes' time—two, no, three eggs, fried both sides, and my China tea and he's to make certain the water's boiling. They don't seem so very excited to see us."

A little cluster of men huddled together in the lee of a deckhouse were sheltering from the spray which broke over the trawler as she wallowed broadside on in the heavy sea. They stared impassively at the slim grey length of their deliverance. One of them waved an arm and the man next to him bent down to light his pipe. Presently another of the crowd detached himself and, balancing with difficulty on the roof of the wheelhouse, informed the cruiser with a pair of hand flags that the trawler was out of fuel, short of food and fresh water, but otherwise all right. Then he gave a final wave of his flags and clambered down to rejoin his companions.

The cruiser's ship's company seemed far more interested in the whole business than the fishermen. Men in oilskins, stokers off watch, in overalls, and unlaced boots, pale-faced troglodytes up from storerooms and switchboards down below, all clustered at the rail and discussed with relish what terrible things might have happened if they had not come up with her.

" Would a' started eatin' each other in a couple o' days, like as not," observed a large man with a dragon tattooed on the hairy chest which stuck out of his overalls. " Why o' course it's been done," he turned round indignantly. " Began with the ship's boy, they did, but as soon as they polished 'im off a ship come along and picked 'em up—stark raving mad, they was, the whole boatload—they did, I tell yer, seen it in print, I did." He looked down at his companion, a mournful skinny little man with large ears. " 'Ope as I'm never shipwrecked along o' you, Shorty; you wouldn't make much of a dinner."

The boatswain and a party in oilskins, swaying to the heave of

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the glistening quarterdeck, were busy getting a raft over the stern, a raft to which fresh water and provisions, and—most welcome of all—a wicker-covered rum jar had been securely lashed. They veered it astern on a grass line as the cruiser steamed slowly across and round the bows of the labouring trawler, so that the little knot of men on her forecastle were able to grab the bight and in a minute were hurrying to the shelter of the deckhouse to see what the Royal Navy had sent them.

Interest in the proceedings died away after that. The trawler could not be taken in tow until the weather moderated, and as the cruiser stood protectively by, the respective ships' companies soon got bored with catching occasional glimpses of one another as both ships rose and fell in the long seas. Only the officer of the watch up on the forebridge continued to have any interest in their tiny consort.

At two a.m. the officer of the middle watch was looking forward to his cocoa when a succession of short flashes on a rather dim lamp came from the trawler—her first sign of life for hours.

"Calling us up!" he shouted at the signalman.

"Answering him, sir," came a voice as the thin beam from an Aldis lamp flickered out across the darkness. What the hell was up now, the officer of the watch wondered irritably. Had she sprung a leak, was she foundering or had some damn fool slipped and broken his leg—and why did everything always wait for *his* middle watch to happen?

"What," read out the signalman with long pauses as the feeble signal lantern in the other ship haltingly spelled out its message, "was . . . result . . . of . . . last . . Test . . . Message ends, sir."

Luckily the officer of the watch was one of those people who would make a volume of Wisden—any volume—his first choice as one of the three books to be left with on a desert island.

"Make to him, 'England won by an innings and twenty nine runs,' and ask him if he wants details."

"England by an innings and twenty-nine runs, sir," the signalman repeated as he started clicking the key of his lamp.

Arthur Gilligan's touring side, after losing three Tests, surprisingly won the fourth at Melbourne in February. The officer of the watch had gloated for so long over the scores of England's first win since 1912 that he knew them by heart. With his head in the bridge chart-table he scribbled them down on a signal pad.

"He's just made 'congratulations,' sir, and he'd like the details."

"Stand by, then. Here goes. England five four eight. Hobbs stumped Oldfield bowled Ryder six six. Sutcliffe leg before Mailey one four three—"

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" What's the blighter want now ? " from the signalman.

" Great . . . boy . . . that . . . Sutcliffe," flickered across the water.

The officer of the watch went right through the England innings. At times the trawler disappeared from sight in the trough of a sea, but as she bobbed up again her light would be flashing out the answering sign for the cruiser to go on.

The trawler was using a weak oil lamp with a bad shutter, but it was enough, and with the signalman dancing round the bridge when the cruiser's head paid off, the full scores of Australia's two meagre innings obviously excited the enthusiast in the trawler by the way he answered. Between the innings the officer of the watch drank his cocoa. At last he sang out, " Tate five for seven five. Four for two one on the last morning."

For nearly two hours, with the trawler giving a long flash after each word, the sea and the gale, the loneliness and the danger were forgotten. They were talking cricket.

At the end, " Good-O," came from the trawler which seemed to have been backing England.

Next day the weather moderated, and on a morning of flat calm three days later the cruiser steamed into Wellington with the trawler in tow. Much to the surprise of the cruiser and her tow, all the sirens, whistles and hooters in the place gave them a welcome.

Ordinary Seaman Ballard did not get a gold watch, but he got his photograph in the newspapers, which thrilled him and his old mother on a dairy farm up in the Wairarapa far more.

The Wellington Harbour Board cabled their agents in England for an ocean-going tug, and England lost the fifth Test.

* * *

TWO OF A KIND

An efficiency expert stalked into a government office. Approaching two clerks he asked the first, " What do you do here ? "

The clerk, fed up with red tape, buck passing, office politics, forms and, above all, efficiency experts, answered sarcastically, " As a matter of fact I don't do a thing."

The efficiency expert nodded, made a note, then said to the second clerk, " And you—what is your job here ? "

The second clerk, a fellow sufferer, said, " I don't do anything either."

The efficiency expert's eyes brightened immediately. " Hmm," he said, " duplication ! "

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BIG BUILD UP

In selling her now to the whole world, had he sold her back to himself?

by MICHAEL FOSTER

HARRY MEARS, the publicity chief, sat with his big feet on his desk, using his electric razor. He didn't seem to need a mirror. With a thoughtful finger he would find a patch of beard he had missed, and then sketch away at it.

" Oh. Come in, Mark," he said. " I've got a beauty for you this time. I want it distinctly understood that you have my sympathy in advance."

Mark leaned against the wall, lighting a cigarette and watching Harry. The razor whirred along a jaw.

" I'll remember," Mark said.

Through the window, from this remote and modest wing of the administration building where the publicity men and women had their coops, you could see a wide stretch of studio pavement. In front of one of the enormous hangar-like sound stages, a group of extras in the massive taffeta skirts, the heavy black tailcoats and high collars of the early 1900's, were standing round talking and sweating in the Californian sunshine. And in anxiety.

The extras would be for the big dream-torn musical *Half Century* which the studio was bringing in fast on a last minute hunch, to remind this year 1950 of something or other; nobody knew just what, yet. Four other sound stages were working too, on other pictures. On the front steps of still another set sat half a dozen carpenters, probably the only relaxed people in the place, waiting to build a new set when somebody came along to tell them what was wanted.

" Well, so here's your headache," Harry said. " We've brought a new girl out from New York. One more, one more. This one is the serious type of young modern actress."

" Oh, well," Mark said. " I did fill in an employment form of my own free will." That joke was weak with tired boredom.

" We've got to give her the big build up," Harry said. " Here's what she looks like." With a soft groan he bent forward and from beside his highly polished shoes on the desk picked up a photograph. He handed it to Mark. " New York photo," he said. " We'll make better ones, of course, right away."

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Mark had never felt faint in his life—that is, except with an occasional hangover—but now, for an awful and totally unexpected moment, he heard a sound like distant bells ringing. He stood very still, looking at the glossy print in his hand. Looking at the very clear and truthful eyes, the proud lift of the brows, that lovely but slightly disdainful mouth . . . He had seen those lips pulled back in fury from her white teeth, saying bitter unforgettable things. And he had seen them half dreaming and shakenly sweet. She was his wife.

At least, she had never bothered to divorce him. He had not seen her for two years, nor heard from her. Not since the end of that last bad summer in New York. They were living in a shabby hotel room off Times Square. He was on the copy-desk of an evening paper, that half circle of tired smudged faces you see in the city office of every newspaper, cutting and pasting the copy together and writing the headings; and she had had a couple of months playing small parts in a summer theatre up on the coast, but now she was back.

She was out of work, she couldn't find anything in any of the plays that were going to open in New York that autumn. He would come home hot and sticky from the city office, and probably find her just taking her shoes and hat off after an exhausting fruitless day round the casting offices. She would sit on the cheap counterpane of the bed, her fair hair limp, her face white and thin, while he mixed a drink for them in the bathroom, in a couple of cheap store glasses they had bought. Before going out to dinner at a snack bar. Or, if it was after payday, to one of the better places. And she behaved like a she-devil.

They quarrelled nearly all the time in the sultry barren heat of a New York September. September in New York is bad for everyone, but it's worse when you are young and poor and dry eyed with hopelessness and your only window opens into a sooty brick air-shaft.

And the worst part of it for her, he now guessed sadly, was that he hadn't had enough faith in her ability—not enough belief in her to carry her through the arid discouragement of no jobs. He had never said this, even to himself. Even in their most violent quarrels he had tried not to show it, this lack lustre view of his wife's too fierce belief in herself. Too fierce . . . perhaps that was what told him now of a pitiful need. Too late.

But at the time, so tired and so young, it would have been pleasant to come home to a nice conventional type of wife, instead of to the temperamental difficulties of having an unemployed actress about the house. It's hard to believe your wife is a genius when you'd like a gently sympathetic kiss at the front door, and a quiet

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supper. And sometimes Clare had looked at him with very clear seeing and slowly stricken eyes.

So one time she walked out on him, after one of those looks—he thought now that it was her pride which drove her out. She had stalked out before, but only for an hour or two, to cool off a bit, and then she would come home, and once or twice she had cried a little in his arms. But this time she didn't come back. She just phoned to say that she was going to share the flat of a girl she had known in the summer theatre, and who had a good part in a new play, and that he wasn't to bother her any more, please. He never did. Sick—sick with anger—he left his job next payday and headed for California. He thought the width of a continent was about right. From anything like that.

" Your job is to glamorize her," Harry said. " But with dignity, because we think she's going to be important. Your job is to sell this girl to the whole world."

" Mmm . . . I have a low opinion of the world anyway," Mark said. Times were tough in Hollywood; and besides, what difference did it make? He tossed the photograph back towards Harry's shoes. " All right," he said.

Harry was staring at the ceiling, gently stroking the underside of his double chin with the electric razor. Mark was just as glad of that; it meant that Harry hadn't seen his face, that first moment. Harry was smooth with success, but nothing would ever take the sad wrinkles from round his eyes.

" Her name is Clare Conroy," Harry said, sighing with explanation. " She's been in a couple of New York plays. Secondary parts, but her work has set the critics' teacups rattling, mildly." That was news to Mark. He didn't follow the New York theatre any more. He didn't need to in his work, and he had heard enough about it to last him for a lifetime.

" So we've brought her out," Harry said. " She's just finished her screen tests here, and they're good. Nobody off Broadway knows anything about her. That's where you take over, and start beating the big drum."

He unplugged his razor, wrapped the cord round it, put it away in an untidy desk drawer on top of professional photographs of many beautiful women, and picked up his telephone. In a caressing voice he asked a switchboard girl to connect him with Mr. Sidman's secretary. Joe Sidman was currently one of the top producers on the lot.

A few moments later Harry shoved the phone away and said, " There you are, Mark. Joe is going to use this girl in his new picture, *Night of the City*."

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"Three o'clock," Mark said, and lighting another cigarette he wandered back towards his own small cluttered office.

In the narrow hallway among the clatter of typewriters from all these cubicles he met Kathi hurrying along with a handful of still-photos from the musical.

"Hello, Mark," she said with her shy politeness.

"Hello," he said absentmindedly, but stopped. Somehow you always smiled a little when you looked at Kathi; as even the most worried person will smile and get a different look in his eyes when he sees something very young and awkward and trusting. She was hardly more than a child, probably seventeen, and she was a sort of an apprentice in the publicity department. Her dark hair was cropped to close curls and she wore a black velvet dress with a wide white lace collar on her shoulders. It was quaint, and with her ivory pallor she would be a very beautiful woman one day. Now she looked at you from a long way off, still from the shadowless land of childhood, but trying to come nearer.

"Is it a bad day, Mark?" she asked timidly. She had a funny anxious little way of ducking her head sometimes.

"Not too bad. Not yet," Mark said, and went on into his office.

But he had a glimpse of his wife sooner than he expected. A few minutes before two he was walking across the entrance hall of the administration building when he saw her getting out of a yellow open car glittering at the curb. The young man at the wheel had a matching yellow scarf folded at his throat, under his sports jacket, and he was wearing dark sunglasses. Everything about him said *Actor*. Mark thought, Well, I wonder who *that* is.

As she came up the wide stone steps, Mark faded into the obscurity of the left hand hallway, leading to the Writers' Wing, and slouched at the drinking fountain, watching. He considered that his curiosity was pardonable.

She walked with the calm swing of pride that he remembered so well. She walked like that even in her stockinged feet. This afternoon she had on a grey pin-striped suit, severely expensive, and she had let her hair grow since he had seen her last. She wore it shoulder length now, finely brushed in its heaviness, and it lifted a little with each step. Glancing neither to right nor left she walked to the modernistic oval counter which enclosed the reception clerk. Even at this distance, pretending to bend over the drinking fountain but watching her, Mark could hear her low, carrying voice, the voice of a born actress.

"I have an appointment with Mr. Sidman. Clare Conroy."

The boy phoned to the regions above, and then touched a button.

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At a click, the great oak doors leading to the Executives' Wing swung remotely open.

With a slightly sick feeling, Mark stared in distaste at the drinking fountain. So it looked as though he would have to meet her after all. That was his bad luck. Often you never saw the people you were writing publicity about, and that made it easier.

He went up to Sidman's office at three o'clock. In the rich distances of that sacred room Clare was beautiful and at ease in a pale leather armchair beside the desk. Mark walked the whole length of the carpet and stood in front of the desk, looking at Sidman, before she turned her head to glance up carelessly. Her eyes widened, their grey darkening suddenly, and one hand clenched convulsively in her lap.

" Miss Conroy," Sidman said, " this is one of our highest class publicity men, Mr.—— ? "

" O'Neill," Mark said.

" Mr. O'Neill," Sidman said.

A little faintly, Clare muttered " How do you do," but for an instant she looked at him as if whispering his name. He wasn't sure afterwards whether or not her hand had wavered towards him. As for himself, he not only remembered where they were—all the loneliness welled up in him, and the proud bitterness . . . but also he remembered the man in the yellow car. So he gave her a private look of cold dislike. Her pride goaded secretly, she returned the look with indifferent contempt, but expressionless. Their eyes understood each other very well.

" Now," Sidman said, " I suppose Harry Mears has told you what our problem is. I sent him a very careful memo. Confidentially, O'Neill, our problem is dignity.

" We're going to give her the big build up. The entire facilities of the studio," his bald weary eyes glanced at Mark as one of the facilities, " are going to be devoted to that one word in this connection. Dignity. Allure—naturally. Sex—let the public think it out for themselves. The publicity photographs will take care of that. What I want to do is wake up the public with a sockful of dignity."

" Right," Mark said.

" It hasn't been done since Diana Moberley," Sidman said. " Boy, what a campaign they put on for her ! There was just one word for it—educational. We've got the same chance here."

Mark let the word " educational " pass, but without moving a muscle of his face, gave Clare a secret leer. She knew what he meant, and this time gave it back to him with chill venom, unhesitatingly.

" You can count on the publicity department, Mr. Sidman," Mark said.

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" Now I'm thinking creatively. For this campaign, that's going to be the secret of our success. Not to think along regular lines. No bathing suits, no elephants," Sidman said. " I want you to forget all that technique. That's the wrong technical approach to this problem. Miss Conroy here is different from lots of other girls. She's a very, very distinguished young American actress—at least she's going to be when our publicity gets going, and I'm giving her a feature part in *Night of the City*. Distinguished—we mustn't forget that word." He bent forward to make a note on his desk-pad. " Just look at her creatively, O'Neill, and you'll see what I mean."

Innocently, Mark really turned, and gazed upon her. In disdain, she turned her head away until he could see only the stubborn point of her chin, the tilt of her aristocratic nose. Her hair looked electric with suppressed fury.

And he remembered how she used to stride back and forth across the bedroom in a worn white corduroy housecoat with the belt rakishly knotted on one hip. Then, with an actress' sure instinct, she would abruptly change the pace and timing of their loud quarrelling voices. She would stop, bring that exquisitely modelled face close to his, and in an awful whisper she would practically hiss some heart withering line that she had been saving up for him. And hurt herself, too.

" Now let's get down to business," Sidman said. " Make some notes, O'Neill. You aren't making any notes. Are you married, Miss Conroy ? "

There was an appreciable pause. Mark thought she turned a little paler ; anyway she swallowed.

" Well, I *was* married at one time," she said, very low. " To a—to a newspaperman. I was very young then." Her voice gained in strength of pride as she added, " I've never taken the trouble to locate him for a divorce. He just disappeared."

Mark smiled with the detachment of a stranger, but aimed at her it was a devilish grin. She knew that a divorce just now, at this point, would be very bad medicine for her not-yet-begun career in pictures. She was helpless. She was tied to him. For a while.

Sidman said hastily, " We won't mention any marriage angle, O'Neill. In the publicity, we'll just omit all reference to marriage. Or romance, either. That would be immoral, for the time being. Now what I ask you is, what is left ? Make a note."

With a pencil and a folded wad of copy-paper out of his pocket, Mark pretended to. But he kept remembering odd little intimate things about her.

The way she would wake up in the morning tousled and with

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eyes like flowers, having lost her troubles in sleep; and, feeling for her slippers with her feet, go scuffing across the dusty carpet to start the coffee on the electric plate they had smuggled in. The way she would sit on the edge of a shabby chair with one stocking dangling from a thin hand, her eyes trying to keep a dream—perhaps remembering the sleepy whispers in the dark—until she saw the ugly green walls of that room again.

The way she had once used to hurry towards him in a crowd, when they were meeting somewhere at the end of a day, and slipped her hand into his overcoat pocket with his hand as they walked in the wind and the rain, and both their sleeves threadbare at the cuffs. And at night, perhaps smiling at him with mysteriously shadowed lips, the way her bare arm glimmered rhythmically as she brushed her hair by lamplight.

And perhaps she knew he was remembering things like that. Because unexpectedly she was looking blankly at him too, just once, for a second, before she coolly turned her head away again.

"O'Neill," Sidman said with deep solemnity, "you have a selling job ahead of you. To every man, woman, and child in the civilized world. What is there more wonderful than selling something you believe in, heart and soul? That's why I arranged it carefully so that you could see this girl for yourself. All right, you're impressed. Like I was, like anybody would be. She probably stands for something in your mind already. What is it?"

". . . Dignity," Mark said.

Sidman's face, sick with years of forced belief in things, was old for perhaps fifty-odd, and very kind. Its Californian tan could not conceal that it was grey from the long fight upwards. He sat looking from one to the other of them, thinking of something else to say.

His phone rang. He picked it up, listened, then said with obvious relief, "All right. Tell him to wait just a minute."

He stood up and, uncertainly, so did Clare. He walked with her towards a door at the far end of the room, Mark trailing along behind. That door opened into a back corridor, and Sidman said, "This has been a very, very creative conference."

Mark and Clare walked along the corridor together.

She said in a bitter toneless voice, "It would have to be you!"

"But just think how sort of sweetly wistful it is. Again we struggle towards success together," he said, poisonously. "You don't think I like it, do you?"

"I'm going to see that you're taken off this assignment," she said. "I'm going to tell Mr. Sidman I don't want you doing any of my publicity and I'm going to tell him why."

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He shook his head gently. " I don't think so. It wouldn't do you any good round here if it were known that you're married to a publicity hack. That would detract from your mystery. They would look at you again and perhaps not see how distinguished you are any more."

" I'm going to divorce you ! " she said with a hint of hysteria. " To hell with the consequences ! "

" Oh, no, you won't," he said comfortably. " Not for quite a while. Not until you've made good in several films. If you can."

" You're even worse than you used to be," she said in a tone of dull hopelessness. " So you're cynically world-weary now." But in spite of herself her voice sounded frightened.

He faltered with the sudden clear thought : She still has those feelings of insecurity. She's been through so much, such hard and shaking times, and she still doesn't know whether she's really a fine actress or not. She's clever, and this is the big hurdle. She's afraid. She's afraid of everything. And me in my job—I'm the final touch of horror, because I can't help being cynical about her. I know her too well. I've seen her in such failure . . .

Walking along, he lit a cigarette. " Who was that fellow you drove up with ? "

" It's none of your business, but I'll tell you," she said. " That was Donald Airlie, and he's my—"

An iron grey executive type in country tweeds turned a far corner and came towards them along the corridor. They stopped talking and walked correctly and demurely until the man had passed them and they had heard the door of some office open and close behind them.

" Airlie is your what ? " Mark said.

" He's my idea of what a man should be. Courteous, polished, gorgeously successful but not spoiled, and deeply, deeply understanding of a woman's feelings. Everything you're not." And she looked at him pityingly.

" Well, a hint of a romance with Airlie would be a big help in your publicity build up. Just what I need," he said thoughtfully. " But we can't use it. You're married, and it would be immoral. Sidman said so. You'd better watch your step, my girl. The gossip columnists, you know. They don't know you, but they do watch him."

" So nothing, nothing means anything to you any more ! "

" Maybe I have interests of my own," he said with desperate calmness. " Would that ever occur to anybody ? "

They had reached the main corridor and at the corner they stood breathing hard and staring at each other in baleful concentration.

Slowly, she brought her face close to his, until he could see the

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little flecks of gold in the irises of her eyes; and she spoke in a dreadful strangled whisper:

"You—you wife-deserter!"

He blinked. It dawned on him that perhaps, that last awful time in New York, she had wanted him to come after her, and bring her home . . . and perhaps tell her that he believed in her. And make her believe, too.

But it was too late, now.

And she was walking away from him, her high heels clicking virtuously.

He strolled the other way, back to his office; and Kathi was there, sitting beside his cigarette-scalloped desk.

"Harry said I could help you on this assignment." She couldn't keep from being a little breathless when she was earnest, and that was nearly always. "He said perhaps a woman's touch . . ."

He had to smile again; that sounded so odd, coming from this child—as odd as that black velvet dress which you knew she had bought with anxiety in her beating heart because she thought it made her look older. Kathi lived with her widowed mother somewhere in Los Angeles, and had a long hard bus journey twice a day.

"Kathi," he said, "you're my idea of what a woman should be. Quiet, submissive, not yet spoiled-selfish by some fond bewildered sap, and respectful of a man's deeper feelings. Everything some girls are not."

By that time he was standing at the window with his back towards her—strange, how often in a studio you find yourself staring out of a window at what little outdoors you can see—but now he looked round at her silence. Sitting there, her head was bent low because she knew that he was teasing her.

"Well, here's Marta's memo to Harry about the girl's New York record and about her contract," he said brusquely, taking it out of his pocket. "It will give you an idea of what we have to go on."

A couple of days later they were really at work. The mill was running full blast. All the columnists and radio people had been taken care of in due order of their importance, and straight news releases about the contract had been offered the wire services through the regular channels. Some interviews had been arranged for, and through Sidman's office, dates had been ordered for Clare to be seen lunching at the right places with the right people on the right days. And now the first publicity photographs were coming through.

They were star-shiny with expert glamorous lens-work. Clare with a borrowed sports car, with a speedboat, with somebody's golf clubs on a Beverley Hills course, with a deep-sea fishing rod—

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wearing shorts to show her long perfect legs. That took care of the Californian sports angle.

Clare chatting informally with established stars in various settings. Clare conferring with Joseph A. Sidman, her producer; with Leo J. Bushmill who had been named director for the forthcoming Sidman production, *Night of the City*. Clare in a dozen different kinds of the most expensive clothes, and a couple of dressing-room shots with not very many. And one extremely daring shot of Clare reading the script of *Night of the City* with slant eyed horn-rimmed glasses, like a Wellesley graduate. *Dignity*.

Mark had kept out of it as much as he could while the photos were being made. When he and Clare did have to meet, with the photographers, they both behaved perfectly with detached and courteous voices. Now he was writing the captions. Mechanically. It was his job.

" . . . *Distinguished young American actress,*" he wrote over and over again. " *Acclaimed by New York critics as* . . ."

Once in the middle of the sticky afternoon he hit a new slant. " *Beautiful and tempestuous Clare Conroy,*" he wrote, " *who has come fresh from Broadway successes to* . . ." Well, that's one word for it, he thought. *Tempestuous*.

He tossed this one across the desk to Kathi.

" Here's a pattern we can use for a while," he said. It was the first word he had written from his personal knowledge of Clare.

With hurried proud fingers, and a smudge of carbon across her nose, Kathi started typing some captions on her own.

But Harry called Mark in next morning.

" Where'd you get this ' tempestuous ' line ? " he asked.

" Oh, it just occurred to me. Watching her," Mark said.

Harry hesitated. " Well," he finally said, " I guess it's dignified enough. It's got a little action in it, anyway. We'll pass it. This whole batch can go to the mimeographing room."

That afternoon there was a date in Clare's hotel suite with a film magazine writer whom Mark had snared. This might be a tricky one; he knew he ought to be there to make the introductions and get the interview slanted right from the beginning, and he took Kathi with him because she begged so hard without saying anything. Also, so as not to be alone with Clare.

The sitting room of Clare's suite was in grey and soft greens, and she was wearing a grey hostess gown, pearl embroidered. These suave monotones of neutral colours made her fair hair startling, as if it gathered all the light in the room, and her long skirt whispered —to him—of poorer times as she walked.

Feeling a sardonic tightness about his mouth, Mark managed a fair imitation of a business acquaintance's smile. Perhaps a little

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surprised to see a girl with him, she looked over little Kathi with remote eyes, but her expression cleared in an odd sort of way when Mark explained that Kathi was one of the girls in the publicity department; and after that she was perfectly charming to the child, ignoring Mark, while they waited for the writer.

The film writer, a Miss Glocker, was a tall awkward woman in an astonishing black picture hat, and when Mark let her in she swept across the room with both hands outstretched to greet the young newcomer to Hollywood. In worried haste, Mark interrupted as soon as he could and started the smooth type of sales-chat he had learned by listening to Harry. Careful, in this case, not to intimate that it had ever occurred to anyone that Clare was good looking, he dwelt with lame but desperately fast thinking eloquence upon her cultural background in the New York theatre, the words gritting in his throat.

"—and at the studio we know how awfully fortunate we are to be getting this type of intelligent serious young actress, these days," he said. "The Industry needs serious cultured women."

He had Miss Glockler nodding solemnly, as if she were thinking: *How true!* With a slight emotional twitch the long pitiful face stared back at him.

"Deep and sensitive natures are so often cruelly misunderstood," he said to her gently. "This—this girl you are going to interview. She knows."

"My dear—may I call you Clare?" Miss Glockler said impulsively reaching out both her hands again. "We have so much, so much to talk about! You and I!"

But Clare was looking at Mark with big eyes. She swallowed. "... oh. Yes—of course," she stammered. "I mean—certainly, Miss Glockler."

A minute or two later Mark moved to the telephone at the far end of the room, and in low tones ordered two dry Martinis to be sent up. Then, sharply remembering, he looked round for Kathi.

She was standing in the dim background, an isolated and faithful little figure by the tall curtains of a window. Nobody had thought of asking her to sit down. He signalled her with a sidways jerk of his head, and she came and stood beside him in front of the two women and they said their goodbyes. From the door he looked back and winked at Clare, who nodded imperceptibly. It was up to her from there on.

On the way back to the studio in Mark's second-hand car, Kathi was silent beside him for a long time.

"You know," she said miserably, "that woman's in love with you, Mark."

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" Who, Glockler ? " he said, false with uneasiness.

Kathi sniffed.

Mark didn't see Clare any more for a long time. Ten days.

He was turning out reams of copy ; and to do it, he was thinking about her nearly all the time. Sometimes this made him nervously angry ; he was off his food and for the first time in his life he would take a short drink now and then while he worked, but because he knew her so well he was beginning to get all sorts of little intimately revealing touches in the publicity, and the copy was getting better and better. It was even getting sincere.

" *—highlighted in the world's most glamorous profession,*" he wrote, " *she is still the kind of girl a man would like to meet after the weariness of a day's work. Intelligent, hard working herself, here is a young actress who represents, in a modern America, a type of girl which . . .*"

Kathi told him in a small fading voice that he looked pale, and asked him if he were feeling all right. She tried to make it sound companionable, though, like a tough old newspaper girl. Laughing a bit in spite of himself—somehow Kathi always cheered you up, just by being so young and sort of funny—he gave her a feature story to write.

Dreaming over his typewriter, Mark kept thinking about Clare in her hotel suite—his imagination kept giving him the most upsetting secret pictures of her in those beautiful quiet surroundings.

And he kept remembering when she was younger and poor and fierce with determination. So he wrote a feature story about the hard road of a young actress in New York. It was some story, perhaps too lyrical for the press, and even while he was writing it he knew that he was arguing with himself. " *Youth, and poverty, and the doors of the world that wouldn't open,*" he wrote. " *Across the pages of her present Hollywood contract, lies the shadow of a lonely young girl whose courage . . .*"

And writing there in his untidy coop, he thought : Perhaps that is true—at least perhaps partly. Perhaps I didn't look deeply enough. Perhaps I didn't understand her.

At least it explained to him their quarrels.

After lunch, though, he looked at that page pretty sourly. The odd part of it was, he still didn't know whether she was a better-than-average actress or not ; and he didn't think anybody else knew, either. So he began worrying for her sake. Suppose she couldn't live up to this publicity campaign ?

Absently he tossed this story across the desk to Kathi as a guide to help her in her work.

He got up and was prowling round restlessly when Kathi, from

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her typing table, said "And you're in love with that woman, too."

He stopped, and had his mouth open to answer derisively—and again uneasily, as when they had been coming back from Clare's hotel. But the way Kathi had said it this time made him look at her suddenly. Her face was half turned away. Obscurely shocked, he realized that he had better tell this child now, before she . . . well, he had better tell her now.

"Listen, Kathi," he said gently, "there *is* something, that nobody else must know. Clare is my wife."

Kathi sat utterly motionless. Only, the part of her face which he could see seemed a little bit whiter. Quietly, he told her the story, beginning with the shabby hotel room off Times Square.

"You've hated her," Kathi said dully. "She left you when the job was hard. As it is for everybody."

"Yes," Mark said. "But you don't understand. She—"

"But you don't hate her any more," Kathi said. "I guess it's funny. Your job has been to sell her to the whole world, and you've sold her again to yourself."

Mark tried to laugh. But it didn't come off very well. For the first time, Kathi turned her head slowly and looked at him. Not from the land of childhood any longer. She had arrived, she was here now, and her eyes found it desolate indeed.

"Poor Mark," she said softly. "It *is* a kind of joke, isn't it? And you don't know what to do about it, do you, Mark?"

He had to get out of here. Dimly—he wouldn't let himself face it clearly—he knew that this was Kathi's first love. And he couldn't bear to look at her eyes any more.

With a dry throat he muttered something about having to see Harry Mears. From the corridor he glanced back hurriedly. Kathi's hands were lying empty in her lap. The white lace collar on her shoulders still looked very childish.

That evening, driving aimlessly along the Sunset Strip because the walls of his one-room flat were beginning to close in on him, he saw Clare and Donald Airlie in evening clothes going into a desirably overcrowded restaurant. One of the uniformed parking-boys was taking Airlie's yellow car out from the curb, so Mark had a reasonable self-excuse to stop his own car for a minute in the blue Californian twilight. Anyway, they didn't see him. Crossing the pavement, Airlie was laughing and saying something and Clare was laughing and looking up at his face and the doorman was swinging wide the door for their entrance.

Mark was late for work the next morning. Hopelessly, but still worrying about how good an actress Clare was, after all, he told Harry that at this point he thought he should see her screen tests.

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Might get some new ideas, he mumbled. With mildly puzzled irony Harry gazed upon Mark's drawn and sleepless face, but put in a request for a projection room.

Kathi stayed away from Mark's office all morning, pretending she had breathlessly important business in the mimeographing room; and when he did see her, she looked as if she hadn't slept much either.

By three o'clock, though, when they started for the projection room, there was a difference in Kathi. She walked beside him with a white resolute face, as if something had happened that gave her a secret courage. Then, as they walked down a long corridor they saw Clare and Donald Airlie coming towards them from the direction of the main hall.

Kathi faltered badly, but only said in an astonished whisper: "Why—isn't that—I mean the man with her, is that—?"

Mark answered with a brief growl. The request for the showing of the tests had had to be passed by Sidman's office, so Clare could have heard about it; and he had the quick bitterness of thinking: She wants Airlie to see her on the screen, that and money are probably the only things that could impress him about a woman, and she wants to—

The thought trailed off in startled confusion as he heard Kathi at his side draw a deep shaken breath, and then she had taken his arm and was laughing up at his face.

Even at that distance, even in the initial stages of shock, Mark saw Clare stiffen. "Oh, hello, Miss Conroy," Kathi called. "I'm so glad you could come."

They all met at the door of Projection Room C. Clare's eyes were big again, but turning very frosty as she looked Kathi up and down. Finally she nodded curtly. "Nice of you to ring me," she said.

"Not at all," Kathi said with the graciousness of a woman who had got what she wanted and was willing for everybody else to be happy too. "Mark and I just happened to think that perhaps you might help us get some fresh ideas."

Mark opened his mouth once or twice, but for Clare's sake nobody was supposed to know that they were married, and anyway before he could say anything Kathi was steering him through the projection room door, almost hugging his arm and walking so close that they kept bumping awkwardly together. Poor Kathi hadn't ever had any practice at this sort of thing, she didn't know how. But she kept talking, in little dove-murmurs to him. And in the midst of confusion he realized how sweet Kathi's voice would be if she were the one you loved.

They all sat down among the big leather chairs and ashtrays, and Airlie with open amusement was watching Kathi's play. Clare wasn't; stonily she stared at the blank screen.

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And then Mark glanced at Clare again, and saw that it was working.

"Kathi—my dear . . ." he whispered helplessly.

The operator in the projection booth called down from on high: "Ready, folks?" Mark waved his hand. The lights went out, and suddenly somebody else was there. A woman who stood on the screen, looking out, far out beyond them, while the disembodied hand of some assistant director held in front of her a small blackboard chalked with her name and the cabalistic numbers and letters of her first screen test. The hand and the blackboard whisked away, and in a low voice the woman began to speak.

For her first test, Joe Sidman, a kind man and wearily shrewd, who hid his great compassion for the young and still earnest, had ordered a three minute scene out of one of her Broadway plays. To warm up on, to feel at home. The camera panned to the left and there was a middle aged man, one of Hollywood's best loved old timers reading a character part for her—and Clare, Clare was playing him off the boards. You even saw the old timer's blink, you could see his old warrior's face lift up to battle as he forgot that this girl was young and nobody, and started playing back, to an actress.

To a woman, magnificent and powerful; to a voice haunted and merciless in the dawn of its greatness. The woman on the screen, and that voice—dominating, wiping out everything else, utterly dominating the four people who sat in a row beneath her in the projection room. It was Clare, but a quality greater, far greater, than Clare herself who sat there. To Mark, someone he had never known; perhaps someone he could never know. It was a great actress, coming in.

Mark turned his head and stole a curious look at his wife. She looked small, somehow huddled, sitting there under the tremendous woman of victory on the screen.

For the second test Sidman had ordered a love scene. Out of *Night of the City*. There was a young actor, somebody or other, reading the opposing lines . . . And that voice again, muted now, a little husky, shocking in its hidden power—and then the face suddenly lifted, looking away again, looking at greatness and carrying them all to greatness with it—and the voice, even quieter, shaking the darkness with passion.

And Kathi, little Kathi, sitting in stunned realization.

". . . oh," she whispered.

Hopelessly, hopelessly her hand slipped from Mark's sleeve, and humbly fell away.

And Clare, the small real Clare, was standing up abruptly, her

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thin edged voice cutting into the deep voice from the screen. " Stop this. I've had enough," she said. And when the film wavered and blinked out and the lights went on, Clare said with a viciousness that would have been sandpaper on a sound track, " Go away. All of you. I want to speak to my husband."

Airlie's too handsome face was agape, and then was becoming ugly with anger. " Your husband ? " he said with too much urbanity.

" Yes. This one," Clare said, nodding ominously towards Mark. " Go away, Don. And you, too, Miss—Miss—whoever you are."

Mark didn't pay much attention to Airlie's ironical bow, much too stagey. He was watching Kathi as she walked away. Once she looked back. That which she had done had made her a woman, smiling ever so little with sad eyes. To help one she loved she had been willing to take humiliation, and great pain. Slowly she walked out of the projection room ; towards maybe a clearer future than any of them, Mark thought. Youth, and the shining heart . . .

And after Airlie was gone too, Clare said :

" Now what have you got to say for yourself, Mark ? You—you libertine ! You're married, you know. To me."

And suddenly Clare had softened ; unbelievably, she was crying.

" Oh, Mark, do you really believe all those things you've been writing about me ? You never used to think anything like that about me. Before."

" I'm—I'm afraid I do," Mark said, the best he could. " My tough luck. Now."

" They've been so beautiful," Clare sobbed.

And then she stopped crying. Her eyes narrowing, she brought her face close to his again.

And crooked one arm fiercely round his neck.

And kissed him.

" You liar," she said uneasily. " But I can make you *really* believe them. For ever."

* * *

ON WITH THE NEW

The French novelist Honoré de Balzac loved the good things of life. When an uncle, who was old and stingy, left him a large sum of money, Balzac wrote the good news to his friends in these words : " *Yesterday, at five in the morning, my uncle and I passed on to a better life.*"

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MURDER

Such things happened only to other people, surely?

by WILLIAM SANSOM

A BUZZ at the door, one, shorter than the postman's, shy as the fingerpush of a visitor who feels his visit has no right. Neal approaching the door peered uncertainly at the shape unfocused behind the frosted glass: certainly this visitor was a short one, short as his timid buzz. He opened the door. There stood a man he had never seen before.

Moreover, this short strange man was leaning his head forward, standing with his feet close together, smiling. He wore a round snub-peaked cap of unusual design, an informal uniform of slack pale brown material; from his hand hung a canvas bag like a large quiver, and from this there stuck out the ends of a set of dark, metallic rods. Nor did his next behaviour relieve Neal's first small sense of perturbation—for now the stranger made no more attempt to introduce himself, but stood simply quiet and smiling, pushing his face upwards and staring with almost, it seemed, love for Neal. For some seconds they stood thus facing one another.

In this silence, which grew to be uneasily intimate, Neal found that he was observing with disquietening clarity each configuration of the stranger's face, as though it were the face in a particularly clear engraving. This may have been occasioned not only by the silence, nor by the unease of such an encounter, nor even by the features themselves, so large, so grossly defined in a head too big for that small body—but also by the fact that there was snow upon the ground. The snow, now thawing in a bright February sunlight, refracted a cold light from the ground and thence from the pale house wall, a flood of bright light thus in all directions; it brought into abrupt definition the brown figure sharp against the white yard, yet at the same time flooded the face and front of this stranger with its cold, clinical, reflected light.

Neal saw thus the features of a man of thirty, heavy yet in many ways feminine, as though perhaps in his boyhood this face had been a girl's yet had now become expanded and grossened by an access of repressed male secretions. The pale eyes were thickly lashed, and dreamed from beneath heavily fleshed lids. The mouth cut too largely across cheeks whose dimples seemed to occur

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then somewhere by the ears—this was an over-formed mouth, baroque-lipped, pink, revealing at each further corner two rows of small and absolutely regular teeth. The mouth of a mastodon cupid. Altogether the face, over its blue hairgrowth shaved smooth, of an actor roughed and kohled—yet with such exaggerations and colours richly faded and grown into the tegument of the face itself.

All this Neal saw engraved round a certain smiled seduction dreaming up in that white light, with the sun sparkling on the thaw-points dripping round; then suddenly the stranger spoke, apologetically, as though he should never have arrived, though arrived as he was he loved it. He said: "Sweep, sir."

A voice so soft. Neal smiled. "Of course." And instantly the scene behind, the snow and the thaw and the cause of so much cold light became recognizable. Neal was soon thinking, as he ushered the sweep inside, that of course there had been neither mystery nor unease in that encountered pause, that only such a strangely vivid light had electrified the man's figure into a harder and franker reality than would normally have been perceived. The meeting had never been unreal, it had merely been too real.

In the shade of the hall the sweep looked like a quite normal small man, with a head too big but in no way cretinous, with a markedly obsequious manner that was hardly unusual, with a smile slow and pleasant but in the soft sense weak.

Neal called through to his wife.

The sweep stood waiting, half bowed, with his feet still close together—a dummy man. Then Elsa came hurrying out from the bedroom, her arms laden with sheets, her head poking above them, her lips saying many things at once. It had been one of those mornings set aside for accumulated odd jobs, so that perversely they had stayed in bed and breakfasted too long, putting off the businesses in the imagined luxury of a morning containing so many hours—ten o'clock, eleven, twelve offering themselves forward endlessly—yet really munching away the time on their hungry pillows.

However, now the sweep had pressed the button for action—and in almost one movement Elsa had gathered up the dust-sheets, shepherded the little sweep into the room with the chimney, and finally closed the door. So that Neal stood alone in the hall in a sudden quiet after such a feminine, sheet-flurried whirlwind. The draught-felt on the bottom of the door muffled any sound from the room, stifled absolutely whatever Elsa might be saying to the sweep. Provoked by the silence, Neal walked into the room next door, a small empty room where he was painting a chair.

The chair islanded on its carpet of newspaper made absolute

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the vacuum of four undecorated unfurnished walls. It was anyhow a box of a room, once a china storeroom among the kitchens of the huge old house and now a spare bedroom in Neal's flat. There was one window, and this looked out on to the level garden. Through this the full illumination of the snow now shone, flooding the ceiling corners white, purifying every inch of the floor, walls and ceiling in shadowless bright light. The smell of paint increased the feeling of a room untenanted, exorcising all other faint smells of dust and use.

No sound came through the wall from the other room. Only from outside the thaw dripped, regularly, dripping light long drops as from an immense liquid chandelier depending from the bright sun somewhere outside. In such a vacuum, in such a silence full of mineral sound, Neal bent down to his brushes, dipped them in the oiled cream and began to paint.

For a time submerged in his task he forgot about the sweep and Elsa in the next room. With long sensuous strokes he smoothed a patina of paint down the chairlegs, then itched with fussing dabs the corners and underneath; only once the whole flat surface of the seat welcomed a smearing of wide easy strokes, when the paint settled down within itself to a most satisfactory square of liquid cream. Through his absorption, Neal became conscious now and again of one faint sound, muffled and distant, from the next door room—the rattle of the sweep's sticks.

Presently, irritated by a recurrence of unforeseen unpainted leg-backs, his fingers gloved with quick-drying paint where he had gripped what he had already painted—he stood up. It was time, even after ten minutes, for a breathing space. His back seemed to curve with ache. He straightened upright and found himself facing the window.

Outside there stood, surprisingly, a snowman. A second later he remembered that, of course, a snowman should have been there—he had built it on the previous day. However, in the change of his eyes from the close focus of the chair to the wide light room and all the breadth of the world in the garden outside, such a white manlike figure, still as death, proved naturally to be a surprise. So that Neal studied the figure more intently than before, more detachedly, conferring upon it a greater presence of its own. He chuckled—and then the smile altogether left his lips.

An old fishing cap stood on the snowman's head, a grey scarf hung slack like a drowned squirrel from his neck, a twig stuck out from the lipless mouth to make a sort of cigarette. The snowman looked thus at first sight a figure of fun—with its pinioned arms, its no-legs, its portly helpless tilt. But then—Neal grew conscious

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of the eyes. In the place for eyes two round black pebbles had been stuck. Now, of all the pale-tinted snow-hung garden, where the trees hung heavy and the live thaw dripped its deadness on every living thing—the snowman was the only creature that might have moved, that might have had life, that had eyes.

Those eyes stared. Black eyes, small and ghostly as a gull's. Sockets that had shrunk to a squinting second sight. And since the snowman was placed some yards out on the lawn directly opposite the division between the two rooms it would thus have been able to see into both windows.

Whether it was this omniscient stance or whether the newspapers on the floor—with their stained print telling old stories of real reported deaths—suggested to Neal a sensation of crime, or whether it was probably both . . . together with the thaw's dripping silence, and the draughted vacancy of the room . . . however that could be, Neal suddenly felt the presence of the next-wall room, of its separation, of the two people enclosed in it alone: and he felt a sense of evil, of the perpetration of things not right.

But—what exactly could not be *right*? Something against his orders? . . . Nonsense . . . he gave no orders . . . Then something opposed to his views of behaviour . . . again what? . . . he had few such views, except on some violences, some extreme familiarities. Such as Elsa flirting with the sweep? He smiled, despite the snowman, despite not quite wishing to smile.

He saw Elsa's housecoat falling back from her leg, saw the intense enquiry in her eyes as they lit—as always—to see whether her attractions were properly received. So—then the sweep would kindle; smothering her with his soot he would embrace her, kiss her with his sweep's lips, do her in; then what? . . . sever her head with his scoop? Stuff it up the chimney? Stuff it in the soot-bag? . . . Neal laughed aloud, so that the empty walls rang back the laugh which then sounded as absurd and delighted as his imagining. Impatiently he turned back to the chair.

Nevertheless, some negative sense persisted, slightly, deeply—a spiral of unease drifting behind his other thoughts. It was the same feeling, he remembered suddenly, as when he had returned once to find the flat burgled. Then also there had not been much to complain about. Only a broken window, a few oddments taken in a hurry. But cupboards were open, a suitcase had been moved, drawers were not shut as they should have been . . . there was a dark sensation, a whisper, a veil of ancient dread along the passages and round corners, behind doors and in every room, a whisper not of violence nor of attack but more of a sense of privacy invaded that translated itself into words repeated and repeated in his ear, softly, as though from the reaches of very distant years, the deep

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and hollow warning voice from a fairy-tale. "Someone has been here," the whisper groaned, as it hovered over each possessive corner of his house, "someone has been here . . ."

Irritated, over-fancying, he turned abruptly back to his work. The brush was sticking to a piece of newspaper. He tore it off. The paper stuck to his fingers. A line of paint fell in a thread like white treacle down to spot his shoe. He swore, turned the chair upside down to paint the underneath; but then the top, newly painted, began to stick to the paper. The whole affair seemed absurdly difficult with only the most tedious resource, that of leaving it to dry and starting all over again to paint at some other time . . . he got up again, and, suddenly tired, abandoned the chair altogether.

Walking with the paint-pot in his hand, he crossed to the wall and began to edge the brush along the wooden dado rail. In silence he worked for some minutes. Sometimes, as he edged along, his shoes shuffled on the boards, sounding a resonance from underneath, echoing like a sudden cough in the stillness. Conscious then of the depth of the quiet, of the immobility of the air in that white room, of the snow's reflection on the white plaster, of the disquieting purity of such an acrid, paint-poisoned, virgin silence glassed and ticking with the outside drip, drip, drip—Neal began to whistle. He whistled two bars of a popular tune, then as abruptly stopped.

Absorbed in his brush, the tune had struck his ears impersonally, as from any other agent but his own lips, violently human in such a painted silence. He stopped whistling, self-conscious. The silence dropped again like a stone weight. The paint brush smoothed along quietly, with no sound whatsoever.

Then Neal suddenly halted the brush—for some reason, not the whistle, not the quiet paint brush; the silence was different from before. He stared into the wall—with an alertness possible only to a person alone in a room charged with his own solitude. He cocked his head, listened. Then he had it! The one sound, the sound of the rattle of the sweep's stick—this had stopped.

For how long? How long had the rattle not been . . . As he thought back, it seemed that such a sound must have stopped some time ago. An irregular sound, it could not have suddenly forced a contrast of quiet, like the stopping of a clock. What then . . .? Facing the blank wall, his mind flashed sideways towards the snowman and to the snowman's eyes that could see into the other window. He felt again the presence of such a comic, powerful figure—felt that, as with the penetrating sightlessness of a blind man, whose eyes look inwards and think, that these slate-black eyes of the snowman knew all about him, about the house, about the morning . . .

In momentary puzzlement he saw down by his shoes and through the fluttering screen of his eyelids an old newspaper

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folded out thin and flat on the floor. An old paper, dead two months at least. 'Muzzed photographs proclaimed faces among the headlines. Headlines of violence—deaths, robberies, accidents, manslaughters, murders. All these had happened two months ago, all were forgotten: now this very fact seemed to prove their greater reality. This in turn suggested instantly that such things being true, they could happen again, in the future, or now, and anywhere, and at any time.

They were no longer the fabrications of the days, the served-up cereal of breakfast news—but histories, true stories happening in certain houses visible in ordinary streets on the turning of a corner: associated much with the daylight, and with suburbs, though no longer with the laurel groves and decrepitudes of old empty houses but now with all the loneliness of one clean house in an endless row of others.

Neal was suddenly seized with terror. Staring at the white wall of plaster facing his nose he was wildly seized with the idea of *possibility*, of what might happen at any time to anyone, and what suddenly he was sure might be happening to him and his morning and his house then at that moment. What risks, what terrible risks are taken at each moment of existence!

And yet . . . all our lives, what might have happened! What *did* happen, two miles away, round the corner, or at this place we chose not to visit on the whim of a moment in favour of that other place to which we went? And when an accident does occur, when something really at last happens to us—then how personal it feels, how entirely individual and private.

Yet each illusionary event in each reported suburb is in no way less ours. The turnings, in retrospect, that might have been taken! The walks up this street, or down that alley, the pauses for the indecision of this way or that, pauses to light a cigarette in the shelter of some strange doorway—when behind us the door might quietly have opened, and in the darkness within what figure might have stood, with what lunatic intention?

But here—Neal shouted within his mind—there is no door! Only wall, muffling barricade of soundless wall. So huge in that second the little wall stretched its plaster endlessly to either side of the silence—no fissure, no picture hung like a window to the imagination, no nailmark, only plaster, plaster, plaster white as a paper blind, negative, dry as the powdered province of the concrete-mixer, a white and powdery blankness blinding everything inevitably with only the answer NO.

And if this is happening, Neal's mind screamed, if this moment is the *now*, then this is the unique fraction of time given me ever to act, and if I don't act what might not be stopped, or what might I even now be too late to stop . . . ?

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He threw down the paint-pot, its paint spewed and piled avidly out on to the boards, he was at the door tugging round the handle, clattering out, tugging at the second door handle in the hall, and then had flung open the second door.

What faced him then was a waxwork scene.

Still, suspended, in that clean daylit second as washed as the sober morning ever was—there the familiar room stood photographed. In it, two figures. Elsa bent over the desk, motionless.

Neal saw the hump of her bent back, the blue housecoat humped with the lines of her body, her hand outstretched and reaching, her face bent awkwardly round towards the door. The other, the sweep, crouching by the fireplace, one of the thick sooted rods held in his hand. Over the fireplace hung the black sweep-screen, and against this in that second Neal saw the sweep's brown-overalled legs braced astride, the body low, agile and frogged with a leaping force, the blunt rod swung back in the hand beneath his face bent forward in profile towards Elsa's body.

Then, like a halted film put suddenly into motion, the sweep's rod curled round towards the fireplace, and with it these braced legs bent down to their knees on the hearth: and Elsa's face, flickering for a moment with indecision, blank as a face awakening from the possibility of having dreamt, suddenly realized Neal's presence and smiled with what seemed to be relief; the lips said: "Oh, it's you!" And the outstretched hand drew forth the book for which, behind the desk, it had been reaching—and she stood up.

The sweep was rattling his sticks far up the chimney, absorbed in the mouselike sound of a little mortar pattering down behind the sheet. Neal stood foolishly, his one hand still on the door handle, his other collapsed slackly to his side. Outside, the sun glinted on a million sparkling thawdrops, the tinselled light threw out a festive clarity as in a bright Nordic room. Nothing, Neal said to himself, nothing . . .

Then, as often, things inanimate took charge. There came a sigh and a light thud from the garden. Neal turned quickly to the window. The snowman's head had toppled off its thawed neck, and now lay, face upwards, staring blankly into the blind sky.

* * *

JUST SO STORY

A Hopi Indian rainmaker tells New Yorkers they get no rain because they live in sin; whereas everyone knows what happens when the pure of heart arrange a church picnic.

Coronet

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MUCH ADO

Ladies, sigh no more,
Men were deceivers ever . . .

Mr. Du Quesne dined and spent the Aft. with us. He was not in good Spirits, owing to disagreeable things happening in his Family with regard to Servants, his Man Servant James Atterton having been too familiar with his two young Servant Maids, Lizzy Greaves, an old Servant Maid of Mine about 23 Years of Age, and another Girl by name Mary, both of which are with Child by James. The former Maid Lizzy, was married Yesterday to James, and the other discovered her Situation only last Night. James had also kept Company with Lizzy's Sister, Sukey, now Servant at Weston House for the last four Years. James never appeared to have been such a sly Fellow as he has proved to be, but much the contrary. We had for Dinner to day a boiled Chicken and a piece of Bacon, some rost Beef and Tarts . . .

JAMES WOODFORDE,
The Diary of a Country Parson, March 4th, 1789

Perhaps

Some lads there are, 'tis shame to say,
That only court to thieve,
And once they bear the bloom away
'Tis little enough they leave.
Then keep your heart for men like me
And safe from trustless chaps.
My love is true and all for you.
"Perhaps, young man, perhaps."

A. E. HOUSMAN, 1859–1936, *A Shropshire Lad*

The Friendly Flute

A maiden refused to marry, refused to marry any one. This came to the ears of a man who liked her. Thereupon he changed himself into a flute and laid himself, in the shape of a flute, before the maiden's door. The maiden found the flute, picked it up, ran to her mother, and showed it to her. Her mother said: "What a lovely flute you have. No one in the village has so fine a flute." The maiden took the flute into the house and leaned it against the wall.

In the evening the maiden bathed. Thereupon the flute spoke

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and said: "I want to bathe, too." The maiden jumped up, ran out of the house to her mother, and said: "Mother, the flute just said: 'I want to bathe, too.' Mother, the flute is surely a man." Her mother said: "Don't bother about it. It is the prettiest flute in the village." The maiden went back in the house.

The maiden lay down on her bed. The flute said: "I want to lie down on the bed, too." The maiden jumped up, ran out of the house to her mother, and said: "Mother the flute just said: 'I want to lie down on the bed, too.' Mother, the flute is surely a man." The mother said: "Forget about it. You have the finest flute in the village. Why shouldn't you lay it on your bed?" The maiden went back into her house.

The maiden took the flute from the wall and laid it beside her on the bed. The flute said: "Oh, but I'd like to lie between your breasts." The maiden jumped up, ran out of the house to her mother, and said: "Mother, the flute just said: 'Oh, but I'd like to lie between your breasts.' Mother, the flute is surely a man." The mother said: "Oh, don't bother your head about it. You have the prettiest flute in the village. Why shouldn't you lay it between your breasts?" The maiden went back into her house.

The maiden laid herself on her bed and put the flute between her breasts. Suddenly the flute turned into a large, strong man . . . The next morning the maiden went to her mother and said: "Now I'm married after all, for the flute was naturally a man. But I'm glad." Her mother said: "Didn't I tell you?"

Mande Folk Tale told by LEO FROBENIUS *and* DOUGLAS C. FOX, *in African Genesis*

Second Thoughts

My second thoughts condemn
And wonder how I dare
To look you in the eye.
What right have I to swear
Even at one a.m.
To love you till I die?

W. H. AUDEN

By Way Of Explanation

People who love once in their lives are really shallow people. What they call their loyalty and fidelity is either lethargy of custom or lack of imagination. Faithfulness is to the emotional life what constancy is to the intellectual life, simply a confession of failure.

OSCAR WILDE, 1856–1900

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Problem

Anne, the slanting afternoon sunlight flecking her view with golden dust and golden glamour, welcomed David and wondered if she ought to ask him if he would have some sherry, for it was nearly six o'clock. So bathed was she in the sunlight that her flush of excitement hardly showed and David merely thought how very nice the Fielding girl was looking. Really she would do one credit anywhere. And how handsome the golden Halliday girl was. How happy in fact could one be with either; not if t'other dear charmer were away, but if one could have both. And, as an afterthought, Rose Bingham too. It was all rather difficult and David preferred to step aside from difficulties.

ANGELA THIRKELL, *Peace Breaks Out*

Sigh No More

Sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more,
Men were deceivers ever;
One foot in sea, and one on shore,
To one thing constant never.
Then sigh not so,
But let them go,
And be you blithe and bonny,
Converting all your sounds of woe
Into Hey nonny, nonny.

Sing no more ditties, sing no mo
Of dumps so dull and heavy;
The fraud of men was ever so,
Since summer first was leavy.
Then sigh not so,
But let them go,
And be you blithe and bonny,
Converting all your sounds of woe
Into Hey nonny, nonny.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *Much Ado About Nothing*

Penitent

We hear that Lord Byron is going to be a good boy, and will never be naughty no more, and he is really and truly writing a new version of the *Psalms*.

EMILY EDEN, *in a letter to Lady Buckinghamshire, 25th October*, 1814

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PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

It was round and it was lustrous—but was it false or true?

by VIRGINIA WOOLF

OLIVER BACON lived at the top of a house overlooking Green Park. He had a flat; chairs jutted out at the right angles—chairs covered in hide. Sofas filled the bays of the windows—sofas covered in tapestry. The windows, the three long windows, had the proper allowance of discreet net and figured satin. The mahogany sideboard bulged discreetly with the right brandies, whiskies, and liqueurs. And from the middle window he looked down upon the glossy roofs of fashionable cars packed in the narrow straits of Piccadilly. A more central position could not be imagined.

And at eight in the morning he would have his breakfast brought in on a tray by a manservant: the manservant would unfold his master's crimson dressing gown; he would rip his letters open with his long pointed nails and would extract thick white cards of invitation upon which the engraving stood up roughly from duchesses, countesses, viscountesses, and Honourable Ladies. Then he would wash; then he would eat his toast; then he would read his paper by the bright burning fire of electric coals.

"Behold Oliver," he would say, addressing himself. "You who began life in a filthy little alley, you who . . ." and he would look down at his legs, so shapely in their perfect trousers; at his boots; at his spats. They were all shapely, shining; cut from the best cloth by the best scissors in Savile Row.

But he dismantled himself often and became again a little boy in a dark alley. He had once thought that the height of his ambition—selling stolen dogs to fashionable women in Whitechapel. And once he had been done. "Oh, Oliver," his mother had wailed. "Oh, Oliver! When will you have sense, my son?" . . . Then he had gone behind a counter; had sold cheap watches; then he had taken a wallet to Amsterdam . . . At that memory he would chuckle—the old Oliver remembering the young. Yes, he had done well with the three diamonds; also there was the commission on the emerald. After that he went into the private room behind the shop in Hatton Garden; the room with the scales,

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the safe, the thick magnifying glasses. And then . . . and then . . .

He chuckled. When he passed through the knots of jewellers in the hot evening who were discussing prices, gold mines, diamonds, reports from South Africa, one of them would lay a finger to the side of his nose and murmur, " Hum-m-m," as he passed. It was no more than a murmur ; no more than a nudge on the shoulder, a finger on the nose, a buzz that ran through the cluster of jewellers in Hatton Garden on a hot afternoon—oh, many years ago now ! But still Oliver felt it purring down his spine, the nudge, the murmur that meant, " Look at him—young Oliver, the young jeweller—there he goes."

Young he was then. And he dressed better and better ; and had, first a hansom cab ; then a car ; and first he went up to the dress circle, then down into the stalls. And he had a villa at Richmond, overlooking the river, with trellises of red roses ; and Mademoiselle used to pick one every morning and stick it in his buttonhole.

" So," said Oliver Bacon, rising and stretching his legs. " So . . ."

And he stood beneath the picture of an old lady on the mantelpiece and raised his hands. " I have kept my word," he said, laying his hands together, palm to palm, as if he were doing homage to her. " I have won my bet."

That was so ; he was the richest jeweller in England ; but his nose, which was long and flexible, like an elephant's trunk, seemed to say by its curious quiver at the nostrils—only it seemed as if the whole nose quivered, not only the nostrils—that he was not satisfied yet ; still smelt something under the ground a little further off.

Imagine a giant hog in a pasture rich with truffles ; after unearthing this truffle and that, still it smells a bigger, a blacker truffle under the ground further off. So Oliver snuffed always in the rich earth of Mayfair another truffle, a blacker, a bigger further off.

Now then he straightened the pearl in his tie, cased himself in his smart blue overcoat ; took his yellow gloves and his cane ; and swayed as he descended the stairs and half snuffed, half sighed through his long sharp nose as he passed out into Piccadilly. For was he not still a sad man, a dissatisfied man, a man who seeks something that is hidden, though he had won his bet ?

He swayed slightly as he walked, as the camel at the zoo sways from side to side when it walks along the asphalt paths laden with grocers and their wives eating from paper bags and throwing little bits of silver paper crumpled up on to the path. The camel despises the grocers ; the camel is dissatisfied with its lot ; the camel sees the blue lake and the fringe of palm trees in front of it.

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So the great jeweller—the greatest jeweller in the whole world—swung down Piccadilly, perfectly dressed, with his gloves, with his cane; but dissatisfied still, till he reached the dark little shop, that was famous in France, in Germany, in Austria, in Italy, and all over America—the dark little shop in the street off Bond Street.

As usual, he strode through the shop without speaking, though the four men, the two old men, Marshall and Spencer, and the two young men, Hammond and Wicks, stood straight and looked at him, envying him. It was only with one finger of the amber coloured glove, waggling, that he acknowledged their presence. And he went in and shut the door of his private room behind him.

Then he unlocked the grating that barred the window. The cries of Bond Street came in; the purr of the distant traffic. The light from reflectors at the back of the shop struck upwards. One tree waved six green leaves against the glass. But Mademoiselle had married Mr. Pedder of the local brewery—no one stuck roses in his buttonhole now.

"So," he half sighed, half snorted, "so—"

Then he touched a spring in the wall and slowly the panelling slid open, and behind it were the steel safes—five; no, six of them—all of burnished steel. He twisted a key; unlocked one; then another. Each was lined with a pad of deep crimson velvet; in each lay jewels—bracelets, necklaces, rings, tiaras, ducal coronets; loose stones in glass shells; rubies, emeralds, pearls, diamonds. All safe, shining, cool, yet burning, eternally, with their own compressed light.

"Tears!" said Oliver, looking at the pearls.

"Heart's blood!" he said, looking at the rubies.

"Gunpowder!" he continued, rattling the diamonds so that they flashed and blazed.

"Gunpowder enough to blow Mayfair—sky high, high, high!" He threw his head back and made a sound like a horse neighing as he said it.

The telephone buzzed obsequiously in a low muted voice on his table. He shut the safe.

"In ten minutes," he said. "Not before." And he sat down at his desk and looked at the heads of the Roman emperors that were engraved on his sleeve links.

And again he dismantled himself and became once more the little boy playing marbles in the alley where they sell stolen dogs on Sunday. He became that wily, astute little boy, with lips like wet cherries. He dabbled his fingers in ropes of tripe; he dipped them in pans of frying fish; he dodged in and out among the crowds. He was slim, lissome, with eyes like licked stones. And

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now—now—the hands of the clock ticked on—one, two, three, four . . .

The Duchess of Lambourne waited his pleasure; the Duchess of Lambourne, daughter of a hundred Earls. She would wait for ten minutes on a chair at the counter. She would wait his pleasure. She would wait till he was ready to see her. He watched the clock in its shagreen case. The hand moved on. With each tick the clock handed him—so it seemed—*pâté de foie gras*, a glass of champagne, another of fine brandy, a cigar costing one guinea. The clock laid them on the table beside him as the ten minutes passed. Then he heard soft, slow footsteps approaching; a rustle in the corridor. The door opened. Mr. Hammond flattened himself against the wall.

"Her Grace!" he announced.

And he waited there, flattened against the wall.

And Oliver, rising, could hear the rustle of the dress of the Duchess as she came down the passage. Then she loomed up, filling the door, filling the room with the aroma, the prestige, the arrogance, the pomp, the pride of all the Dukes and Duchesses swollen in one wave.

And as a wave breaks, she broke, as she sat down, spreading and splashing and falling over Oliver Bacon, the great jeweller, covering him with sparkling bright colours—green, rose, violet; and odours; and iridescences; and rays shooting from fingers, nodding from plumes, flashing from silk; for she was very large, very fat, tightly girt in pink taffeta, and past her prime. As a parasol with many flounces, as a peacock with many feathers, shuts its flounces, folds its feathers, so she subsided and shut herself as she sank down in the leather armchair.

"Good morning, Mr. Bacon," said the Duchess. And she held out her hand which came through the slit of her white glove. And Oliver bent low as he shook it.

And, as their hands touched, the link was forged between them once more. They were friends, yet enemies; he was master, she was mistress; each cheated the other, each needed the other, each feared the other, each felt this and knew this every time they touched hands thus in the little back room with the white light outside, and the tree with its six leaves, and the sound of the street in the distance and behind them the safes.

"And today, Duchess—what can I do for you today?" said Oliver, very softly.

The Duchess opened her heart; her private heart gaped wide. And with a sigh, but no word, she took from her bag a long wash-leather pouch—it looked like a lean yellow ferret. And from a slit

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in the ferret's belly she dropped pearls—ten pearls. They rolled from the slit in the ferret's belly—one, two, three, four—like the eggs of some heavenly bird.

" All that's left me, dear Mr. Bacon," she moaned. Five, six, seven—down they rolled, down the slopes of the vast mountain sides that fell between her knees into one narrow valley—the eighth, the ninth, and the tenth. There they lay in the glow of the peach-blossom taffeta. Ten pearls.

" From the Appleby cincture," she mourned. " The last . . . the last of them all."

Oliver stretched out and took one of the pearls between finger and thumb. It was round, it was lustrous. But real was it, or false ? Was she lying again ? Did she dare ?

She laid her plump padded finger across her lips. " If the Duke knew . . ." she whispered. " Dear Mr. Bacon, a bit of bad luck . . ."

Been gambling again, had she ?

" That villain ! That sharper ! " she hissed.

The man with the chipped cheekbone ? A bad 'un. And the Duke was straight as a poker ; with side whiskers ; would cut her off, shut her up down there if he knew—what I know, thought Oliver, and glanced at the safe.

" Araminta, Daphne, Diana," she moaned. " It's for *them*."

The ladies Araminta, Daphne, Diana—her daughters. He knew them ; adored them. But it was Diana he loved.

" You have all my secrets," she leered. Tears slid ; tears fell ; tears, like diamonds, collecting powder in the ruts of her cherry blossom cheeks.

" Old friend," she murmured, " old friend."

" Old friend," he repeated, " old friend," as if he licked the words.

" How much ? " he queried.

She covered the pearls with her hand.

" Twenty thousand," she whispered.

But was it real or false, the one he held in his hand ? The Appleby cincture—hadn't she sold it already ? He would ring for Spencer or Hammond. " Take it and test it," he would say. He stretched to the bell.

" You will come down tomorrow ? " she urged, she interrupted. " The Prime Minister—His Royal Highness . . ." She stopped. "And Diana . . ." she added.

Oliver took his hand off the bell.

He looked past her, at the backs of the houses in Bond Street. But he saw, not the houses in Bond Street, but a dimpling river ; and trout rising and salmon ; and the Prime Minister ; and himself,

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too, in white waistcoat; and then, Diana. He looked down at the pearl in his hand. But how could he test it, in the light of the river, in the light of the eyes of Diana? But the eyes of the Duchess were on him.

"Twenty thousand," she moaned. "My honour!"

The honour of the mother of Diana! He drew his cheque book towards him; he took out his pen.

"Twenty—" he wrote. Then he stopped writing. The eyes of the old woman in the picture were on him.

"Oliver!" she warned him. "Have sense! Don't be a fool!"

"Oliver!" the Duchess entreated—it was 'Oliver' now, not 'Mr. Bacon.' "You'll come for a long weekend?"

Alone in the woods with Diana! Riding alone in the woods with Diana!

"Thousand," he wrote, and signed it.

"Here you are," he said.

And there opened all the flounces of the parasol, all the plumes of the peacock, the radiance of the wave, the swords and spears of Agincourt, as she rose from her chair. And the two old men and the two young men, Spencer and Marshall, Wicks and Hammond, flattened themselves behind the counter envying him as he led her through the shop to the door. And he waggled his yellow glove in their faces, and she held her honour—a cheque for twenty thousand pounds with his signature—quite firmly in her hands.

"Are they false or are they real?" asked Oliver, shutting his private door. There they were, ten pearls on the blotting paper on the table. He took them to the window. He held them under his lens to the light . . . This, then, was the truffle he had routed out of the earth! Rotten at the centre—rotten at the core!

"Forgive me, oh, my mother!" he sighed, raising his hand as if he asked pardon of the old woman in the picture. And again he was a little boy in the alley where they sold dogs on Sunday.

"For," he murmured, laying the palms of his hands together, "it is to be a long weekend."

* * *

NEW ANGLE

On arrival at the airport a Chinese delegate was besieged by the usual mob of reporters. One of the questions flung at him was: "What strikes you as the oddest thing about the Occidentals?"

He thought for a moment, then smiled: "I think," he said, smoothly, "that it is the peculiar slant of their eyes."

From *The Tatler and Bystander*

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MR. MACAFEE RETURNS

It was the most unselfish decision of his two lives

by ROY WHITTIER

WHEN Elfin Lady of Geckwold whelped her fourth pup, the soul of Mr. MacAfee passed into it. Mr. MacAfee was conscious of his reincarnation; and this was not at all according to plan.

Indignant, Mr. MacAfee tried to spring to his feet, but his legs spreadeagled slowly until his stomach rested on the floor. If this isn't an asinine position for a fifty year old banker! he thought. I'd like to get my hands on the angel who bungled this transmigration.

All he had sought a few hours ago was oblivion. A confirmed disbeliever in life after death, he was certain when he placed the revolver against his temple and pulled the trigger that it was to be the end of everything.

So it was disconcerting to find himself in a room with "SUICIDES, L to M," lettered on the door. For a moment he thought he'd bungled the job—and this was a hospital. Certainly the man who entered looked like a resident physician, except that he had wings. Mr. MacAfee was annoyed by the wings. He gave them a more searching look, hoping to discover wires or straps that would prove them false.

"They're real," said the man who wore them.

"I was afraid so," sighed Mr. MacAfee. Then he said, "I suppose you know I was an atheist?"

"Naturally," said the man with the wings.

"I suppose that will count against me."

"Not at all. We don't mind atheists; we have no trouble converting them."

Mr. MacAfee tried to make the next question casual: "Ah—outside of that, how do I stand?"

"Wretchedly!" said the man. "We abhor suicides. We work on a planned production basis, so we reserve the right to set the date of your death. And we are not ready for you."

"Do I go to hell?" asked Mr. MacAfee glumly.

The man looked at him. "That's as stupid a belief as your

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recent atheism. You're going back to earth to live out a normal life and die a normal death."

Mr. MacAfee looked startled. "When my friends see me, how will I explain my funeral?" he asked.

"You're not going back as *you*," the man explained. "You will assume a different form—to be specific, as a dog."

"But I loathe dogs!" screamed Mr. MacAfee.

"That's the chief reason you're going back as one," said the man. "Poetic justice, we call it."

"What kind of dog?" Mr. MacAfee asked dejectedly.

"You have a choice of three: a Pekinese—"

Mr. MacAfee shuddered.

"—a dachshund—"

"Oh, my God!" groaned Mr. MacAfee.

"We frown on profanity," said the man.

"I'm sorry," apologized Mr. MacAfee querulously. "Let's have the third choice. It can't be as bad as the other two."

"How would you like to be a cocker spaniel?" asked the man.

"Not at all!" said Mr. MacAfee. "But I prefer it to the others."

"Then we're ready to go to the transmigration room. Will you come this way, please?"

Mr. MacAfee had no sooner stretched out on what looked like an operating table than he sat bolt upright again. A horrible idea had occurred to him.

"Will I know I'm a dog?" he asked. "I mean, will I know I'm a man while I'm living this dog's life?"

The man reassured him: "You'll know nothing of your former existence until you return here."

"When will that be?" asked Mr. MacAfee.

"When you have developed some of the finer qualities, such as humility and unselfishness," said the man. "You see, we hope your experience as a dog will help you spiritually. Now if you will lie down, please, my nurse will administer the anæsthetic. I'm sorry the regular anæsthetist isn't here, but it's his day off."

The nurse had slipped a cone over his face. This is it, he thought glumly as he rested on his round spaniel stomach. The man had definitely promised that he would know nothing about this dog business. The nurse had messed things up. Why had he had to shoot himself on the regular anæsthetist's day off?

He'd like to see that damn-fool nurse for just a minute. He'd like to see— All of a sudden it occurred to him that he couldn't see at all. This was the last straw. Born blind. Doomed to grope

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his way through life in darkness. No one would want a dog that couldn't see.

"But their eyes are closed!" said a little girl's voice near by.

"Oh, their eyes won't be open for ten days," said a woman's voice.

Mr. MacAfee had forgotten that all puppies are born with their eyes closed. He supposed he could just eat and sleep until he could see what was going on. It occurred to Mr. MacAfee that he was hungry.

"Why isn't that one eating?" the little girl's voice asked.

"Would you like to lift him over so he can nurse with the others?" said the woman's voice.

The mental image that formed in Mr. MacAfee's mind was startling. If anyone, wings or no wings, thought he was going to learn humility that way, he'd have to think again. He'd starve first!

But canine instinct proved stronger than human imagination, and Mr. MacAfee finally fell asleep, as all good puppies should, with a full stomach.

The litter was six weeks old. The other pups were sleeping in the sun, but Mr. MacAfee was wondering about the stock market and scratching his ear. The toothy woman pointed straight at him.

"Oh, the darling, the perfect little darling!" she said.

Mr. MacAfee looked at her in alarm, but before he could bolt he was lifted and placed in her arms. She made gurgling noises, then said coyly, "Would oo like to be muvver's 'ittle lambkins?"

Mr. MacAfee especially loathed women who talked baby talk. She placed him on the ground and he backed away. "Come to mummikins," she drooled.

Mr. MacAfee had an inspiration. Stiffening one leg, he limped a few feet and fell over. He got up, limped a few steps more, and sat down.

"What's the matter with him?" the woman asked in a voice nine parts suspicion.

"Perhaps you'd better choose another one," said the nice woman who owned the kennels.

"Perhaps I'd better not choose any until you find out what's wrong with them," the other woman said acidly, and stalked away.

When she was gone, the nice lady spoke to her manager: "I don't think I'd really want her to have one of our pups." She knelt beside Mr. MacAfee. "What do you suppose ails this little fellow, Fred?"

Fred picked him up and felt his legs. He looked at his nose. He set him down on his four feet. Mr. MacAfee was in a quandary. If he kept up the pretence, they might dose him with medicine. So he pranced round them, barking.

"He seems to be perfectly all right now," said the nice lady.

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" In all my experience with dogs, I've never seen anything like that," Fred said. " I'll keep my eye on him for a few days, but if there's anything wrong with that pup, I'm a horse trainer."

Mr. MacAfee spent the rest of the afternoon thinking hard. He had to prevent anyone he didn't like from singling him out. When his kind of people came, he'd turn on enough canine charm to make them buy him. But how could he make himself unattractive to others ?

He observed that people seemed to prefer the liveliest puppies. So when visitors arrived he became languid and apathetic. The other pups would race for the wire, their tails wagging furiously. Mr. MacAfee would stretch out, raise his head to take one listless look at the visitors, and collapse into deep sleep.

The scheme worked beautifully. Fred began watching Mr. MacAfee. He even hid behind trees to observe, as Mr. MacAfee frisked and cavorted with his brothers and sisters.

" It's *got* to be coincidence ! " muttered Fred. And yet, every time—every single time . . . ! He's getting me down, thought Fred. If he puts on that lackadaisical air just once more I'll go on a blind that will tide me over *two* weekends.

Perhaps the Fates conspired to keep Fred sober, for the next people who came down the path appealed instantly to Mr. MacAfee.

The girl was tawny-haired with commonsense written all over her face. She came just to the shoulder of the tall, rangy, amiable-looking man beside her. They stopped and looked at the pups. Mr. MacAfee dashed madly up and down the run.

" They're fine little rascals," said the man, " but honestly, Jo, I'd still rather have a sheepdog."

She slipped an arm round his waist and said, " In our cubby-hole of a flat ? It wouldn't work, Peter. Wait till we buy the farm, then you can be knee-deep in sheep dogs."

Mr. MacAfee was wagging his tail and looking straight up at them. Dissatisfied with this worm's-eye view, he romped to the back of the run for a better appraisal at longer range. Satisfied, he returned and barked at them.

" That's a good pup," said Peter. And Mr. MacAfee's heart sank, for Peter was not pointing at him.

Fred scooped up the other pup and handed it to Peter, who gently stroked its ears. Icy apprehension numbed Mr. MacAfee. He must'nt get panicky; he must'nt let fear befuddle him. There must be some strategy— He isolated himself from the other pups, picking a patch of sunshine that served as a spotlight. He sat dejectedly and assumed a mournful expression. As Peter and Jo took a final look round to make sure they'd chosen the best one, Mr. MacAfee let out a wail that epitomized the grief of the world.

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Jo looked at Peter. "That one actually seems disappointed because we didn't take him," she said.

"Could we have a look at that one, too?" Peter asked.

Fred's lips were compressed. His face was grim and taut. Mr. MacAfee's latest performance was almost too much for him, but he handed him to Peter, who placed both pups on the ground.

"Which do you want, Jo?" he asked.

"Well, you picked that one first, so let's take that one," said Jo.

"Right-o!" said Peter as he picked up the other pup and handed it to her. "Darling, you've acquired a dog."

Mr. MacAfee felt as if someone had suddenly pulled the world out from under him. Yet he had no feeling of chagrin at being unable to outmanœuvre a normal cocker puppy.

No one else saw the shiny object fall as Peter drew his gloves from his overcoat pocket. Mr. MacAfee put one paw over it as they started for the house to pay for the pup and get his papers. Fred started for Mr. MacAfee to put him back in the run. Mr. MacAfee deliberately shook his head. Fred stopped in his tracks.

This gave Mr. MacAfee the time he needed.

He gave three short, sharp barks. They were compelling, imperative. Everyone turned to look at him. Then, picking up the shiny object in his teeth, he trotted up to Peter.

"The car keys," said Jo. "He must have seen you drop them."

"Well, would you believe it!" said Peter.

Mr. MacAfee felt quietly elated as he rode out of the yard on Jo's lap. The nice woman who owned the kennels watched them go, then turned to Fred, who was silent.

"Never in my life have I seen anything so amazing," she said. "He must have seen the keys drop, and decided to return them. He must have reasoned it out. What do you think, Fred?"

"I think," said Fred—"I think I need a holiday."

Love is a strange and powerful influence, cogitated Mr. MacAfee. For thirty years he had considered any emotion a maudlin sign of weakness. Now, at the age of five months, he was very much in love with Peter and Jo; not, however, with the blind adoration of a dog for his master and mistress, but rather with the protective affection of a father for his children. So it came as quite a shock when Peter suggested that they might teach him some tricks.

Buffoonery was repugnant to Mr. MacAfee. It scandalized his sense of dignity.

"Let's try," said Jo. "Won't it be fun if we can?"

She was sitting crosslegged on the floor, looking quizzically at Mr. MacAfee. She scratched her ears and smiled at Peter, who came over and put one hand under Mr. MacAfee's chin.

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"What do you think about it, old fellow?" he asked. "Will you learn to do some tricks for us?"

Mr. MacAfee let the full weight of his head rest in Peter's hand and looked up into his questioning eyes. He thought again how much he liked Peter. And Mr. MacAfee made the first completely unselfish decision of his two lives. If it would give them pleasure, he would subordinate his own feelings. He gave a bark.

Peter's whole face broke into a grin. "He says yes."

"Let's teach him to sit up, first," said Jo.

Mr. MacAfee lay in his basket in the kitchenette, pondering the difficulties of muscular control. Peter had placed him in a corner, said, "Sit up, boy," and raised his front feet off the floor until he was sitting on his haunches. Even the two walls failed to keep him upright, as he collapsed slowly like a deflating tyre. After several tries, he managed to hold his position for a second or two. Peter and Jo were encouraged by his willingness, but Mr. MacAfee was chagrined by his clumsiness.

In the faint light that filtered across the garden he could make out the kitchen clock. It was nine minutes past one. Peter and Jo would surely be asleep by this time. He climbed out of his basket. There was a ribbon of grey light in the east when he climbed back in again, self-confident about the surprise he would have for them.

When Peter brought him in from his pre-breakfast walk, Jo looked at them anxiously. "How did he seem?" she asked.

"Lively as a flea," said Peter. "There's nothing wrong with him."

"It's the first time I've ever had to wake him up. I thought he must be ill." She passed Peter the toast.

Mr. MacAfee loved toast. Peter always pretended not to notice him until he had taken a bite. Then he would look down, appear surprised to see him there, and ask him if he could put up with a small bit? This was the moment Mr. MacAfee was waiting for. He sat erect on his haunches; then, curling his head forward, he turned a slow, rolling somersault.

The coffee cup in Peter's hand remained suspended between the table and his lips as he stared at Mr. MacAfee. The percolator froze in Jo's hand. Her eyes were wide, incredulous.

"Do you suppose he could do it again?" she said.

Mr. MacAfee repeated, complete with somersault.

Jo swept him into her lap, her hands under his front legs, her face close to his. She looked him straight in the eyes, then she looked at Peter.

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" He's been practising. Last night. It must have taken him hours. That's why he was so sleepy this morning."

" Do you think we ought to set a place for him at the table ? " said Peter.

Mr. MacAfee's second birthday fell on a Saturday, so Peter was home all day. Jo left at noon to attend a luncheon and bridge party.

Shortly after, Peter asked Mr. MacAfee : " What do we do about lunch, old man ? Cook our own or go to the *Dutchman's* ? "

Mr. MacAfee liked the *Dutchman's*, especially on Saturdays, when the business crowds weren't there. George, the proprietor, would probably have a glass of beer with them. Mr. MacAfee wiggled with pleasant anticipation as he went to the door.

" The *Dutchman's* it is," said Peter.

As they reached their table, a voice at the next said, " Hello, Peter." It was John Borrell, head of the firm where Peter worked.

" What in the world brings you to town on Saturday ? " Peter asked.

" We're seeing a matinée while my wife entertains the Women's Institute." Mr. Borrell introduced the man opposite him. " This is Mr. Dorgan, a friend of mine. Haven't seen him for ten years."

" Nice dog you've got there," said Mr. Dorgan, patting Mr. MacAfee.

" Why don't you sit here with us ? " said Mr. Borrell.

Peter gave his order. George wandered over and hovered a moment, undecided, then said to Peter, " The new equipment's in the kitchen. Want to see it ? "

Peter rose and said, " Will you excuse me for a few minutes ? The arrival of this new equipment is quite an occasion. We've been talking about it for months."

George's face beamed with pleasure as he led the way through the swinging kitchen door.

" Personable young man," said Mr. Dorgan.

" He works for me," said Mr. Borrell. " I doubt if he cares a tinker's damn about kitchen equipment, but he knows it will please George to look at it. He's like that, and people love him for it."

Mr. MacAfee placed his head on Mr. Borrell's foot. Borrell's a fine man, he mused, and he heads a fine concern, one Peter can always respect and be proud of.

" He looks a smart young man," said Mr. Dorgan.

" I'm making him a junior partner on the first of the year," said Mr. Borrell. " He doesn't know about it, so don't say anything. I'm going to tell him the day before Christmas."

" That should make his Christmas for him," said Mr. Dorgan.

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Mr. MacAfee was elated. He felt almost drunk with pride. He wanted to bound into Mr. Borrell's lap and embrace him. Instead, he leaped to the seat beside him and held out his right paw.

Early December found the city in the midst of its first snowfall. Mr. MacAfee sat in the sitting room window. It was time for Peter to arrive, and he mentally checked off another day—one day nearer to Christmas Eve when Peter would know about the junior partnership. He heard his step in the hall and ran to meet him.

Peter was too casual to fool either Mr. MacAfee or Jo. But she waited until they were having coffee in the sitting room before she said, " Suppose you tell me. I know you're dying to."

" How'd you know ? " Peter asked.

" Ever since you came in, you've been exuding little rays of excitement. Come on ! "

" Who do you think I had lunch with ? " Peter asked.

" The mayor," said Jo.

" No."

" The Prime Minister."

" No."

" I give up."

" Mr. J. V. Murton, of Murton, Maynard and Drake."

" What did the nice man want ? " asked Jo.

" He wants me at twice the salary I'm making now."

Mr. MacAfee sat up in alarm. He looked from Peter to Jo and back again, anxiety in his brown eyes.

Jo got up and sat on the floor beside Peter, one hand on his knee. " Peter, we could buy the farm," she said quietly.

" Mmm."

" Do you want to make a change ? "

" Mr. Murton's dropping in tonight for my decision."

" What are you going to tell him ? "

For the first time, Mr. MacAfee wished he had the power of speech. If he could only shout, " Tell him *No !* " If he could only let Peter know that Murton, Maynard and Drake were unscrupulous, unprincipled ; that Peter would either have to become like them or leave ; and, either way, the experience would leave him embittered, cynical, never again the same lovable Peter. If he could only say, " That firm used to be known as Murton and MacAfee, until I shot myself because my own partner framed me to keep his dissolute nephew, Drake, from going to jail."

Peter pulled Jo up on to his lap. " Mr. Murton wants you to be in on the decision," he said.

" He sounds considerate," said Jo.

He's a rat ! thought Mr. MacAfee.

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" I'll tell you what we'll do. You listen to Mr. Murton's whole proposition. If it sounds good to you, you get out of your chair and sit beside me on the floor. If not, stay put."

Jo took his hand. "This should be your decision, Peter, not mine."

Peter smiled. " I'm impatient to see how you look in mink. My mind's made up. I just want to see if your woman's intuition will change it or not."

Mr. MacAfee stretched out with his head between his paws and prayed. The bell rang. Peter opened the door for Mr. Murton.

He still knows how to be ingratiating, thought Mr. MacAfee an hour later. He's winning Jo with his charm before he broaches business.

Finally he came to it! " I've always contended the wife should be co-maker of any decision that affects her husband's future, because it's her future, too." Mr. Murton beamed at Jo. " Now, here's what we have to offer that husband of yours."

He mentioned the fancy figure they would pay, and described a future that sounded like a prospectus for a phony gold mine.

" It's only three weeks to the first of the year," said Jo. " Is that enough notice to give his present concern ? "

Mr. Murton reassured her: " When you make up your mind to leave, the best policy is to leave as quickly as possible."

Mr. MacAfee watched in desperation as she got out of her chair and sat at Peter's feet. " After all, it's Peter's decision," she said.

Before Peter could make it, Mr. MacAfee had an idea. He stood in front of Jo and barked, walked over to Mr. Murton, came back, sat up, and did his somersault.

Peter explained to Mr. Murton, " He wants to do his tricks for you. He'd sulk if you didn't see them."

Mr. Murton despised dogs, but he was too good a business man to let these dog lovers know it.

" I'd like very much to see them," he said. The decision could wait a few minutes; his enthusiasm for the canine performance might even clinch it.

Mr. MacAfee had learned a routine that never failed to amaze his audience. He wasn't interested in amazing this audience, however, though he did each trick perfectly. He was waiting for the climax, the trick that Peter always claimed proved that a dog could understand what was said to him and reason things out.

" I won't mention any names," said Peter, " but somewhere in this room is a person with grey hair and a gold signet ring on the little finger of the left hand. Can you find that person ? "

Mr. MacAfee walked slowly, looking at hair and hands. He stopped in front of Mr. Murton, who applauded vigorously.

" That's right," said Peter. " Now show him how much you like him."

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That was the cue. Whenever given, Mr. MacAfee was supposed to jump into the person's lap, put his forepaws round the person's neck, and snuggle against the person's cheek.

Tonight was different. Mr. Murton felt no warm paws round his neck. What he did feel sent a shudder of horror through him. He looked down quickly. Mr. MacAfee, close against him, was standing on three legs, his hind leg lifted.

Mr. Murton let his rage ruin his judgment just long enough to kick Mr. MacAfee completely across the sitting room. Mr. MacAfee let out one yelp as the shoe struck him, and another as he struck the bookcase. He fell facing the door, so though he couldn't move, he saw Peter holding it open, face white, fist clenched.

"Get out!" Peter said. "Get out, quick, before I forget myself and hit an old man."

"I withdraw my offer," said Mr. Murton.

"I wouldn't work for you if it was the last job on earth!" said Peter, slamming the door after him.

Mr. MacAfee was blissfully happy, though he found it difficult to breathe. It worked, he thought. I was sure I could rely on Murton's temper.

Jo was on her knees beside him. "Get the vet quickly, Peter," she sobbed. "I'm afraid he's frightfully hurt."

When Mr. Waters got up from examining Mr. MacAfee, he shook his head. "I'm afraid he can't last long. The broken ribs have punctured his lungs."

So this is it? thought Mr. MacAfee. I hope I've done a better job than last time.

Jo had his head in her lap. Peter was sitting on the floor beside her, gently stroking Mr. MacAfee's ears. Tears were rolling down their cheeks.

Mr. MacAfee looked up at both of them affectionately. They'll be all right now, he thought, though I would like to have been here for the Christmas Eve celebration.

Peter put a supporting arm round Jo. In a shaky voice he said, "If dogs go to Heaven, we'll see him there some day."

You'll get a surprise when you do, thought Mr. MacAfee as he closed his eyes and, for the second time, passed out of this world.

* * *

FRAMED

"She was as pretty as a picture, and wrapped about her throat was an antique gold chair."

Side-slip, from the Salt Lake City Telegram

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ON THE ROAD

For one magic moment it had seemed the world was hers for the taking

by H. E. BATES

THE wood was flooded with April sunlight, but shallow pools of rain lay wherever there were hollows in the black earth under the oak trees. Black rings of ashes were dotted about the ground where tramps had made their fires and rested, and primroses were blooming everywhere at the feet of young hazel trees. The wind that blew the hazels with a soft sound one against another was sweet and warm and laden with the scent of the primroses. It was like the breath of a new life.

A man came into the wood from the road and strode a hundred paces into it at random among the hazel trees. He was tall and black haired and powerfully broad at the shoulders; except when he stooped beneath the undergrowth. He carried himself superbly, with a slight swagger of his hips, holding his head high up, and sometimes throwing it slightly backward, with unconscious motions of arrogance and pride.

He looked less like a tramp than a fighter, but less like a fighter than some proud, sardonic Indian. His face was muscular and powerful; the skin was burnt tough and dry by the sun, and there was a glimpse of a tattoo mark of a purple and crimson flower on his naked chest. He was dressed in light brown trousers, a black jacket slung over his shoulder, a soft grey hat, and a blue shirt faded and washed to the colour of the sky. He stooped and nicked off a primrose with a fingernail and put the flower in his mouth. He was looking for a place to rest.

He took another twenty paces into the wood and saw the white smoke of a fire among the trees. He stopped and gazed at the smoke for one moment and then walked on. In another moment he came upon a woman and man sitting by the fire on a space of earth between a sallow bush and an oak tree.

The man was asleep with his head against the oak tree and the woman was boiling a can of water on a heap of smoking wood. He saw a black bundle on the earth and an old perambulator pushed back against the sallow.

He stood perfectly still and gazed at the woman without a flicker of his dark eyes. She was dressed in a short black skirt and

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an old stained orange coloured jersey stretched as tight as skin over her big breasts and shoulders. Her hair was very thick and blonde and there was something about her that recalled a lioness: the tawny eyes sleepy and rich with changing lights, the lips ripe and heavy, the large, strong face superb with its passionate languor. She had a newspaper open on her knees, but she put it down on the earth as he looked at her. Her hands were strong and handsome, and the skin was a beautiful golden colour, smooth and with tiny blonde hairs that gleamed in the sunshine.

"Sit down," she said. She waved her hand. There were no rings on her fingers. Her voice was low, careless and husky.

He looked at the man lying with his head against the oak tree. She half smiled.

"He's asleep," she said. "He's all right. You won't wake him."

He sat down on the black earth. He sat so that he could see both the man and the woman at one glance. In an instant he saw astounding differences between them. The man was haggard and white, and the bones of his cheeks stood out clear and sharp as knuckles under his dark eyes. His face was dirty and dissolute and strengthless, and he lay like a man who had received a stunning blow, his closed eyes dark as two deep bruises under his narrow brows. He looked as if he would never wake again, and the woman looked at him with one hasty glance of indifference, as if not caring whether he woke or not.

The water in the can began to bubble, and the woman slipped a stick under the handle and took the can from the fire. The man leaned across without hesitation and quickly shook something brown from a packet into the water.

"You're very smart," she flashed, looking up. "What was that?"

He leaned over and stirred the water with the stick, which he took from her own hands. "Coffee."

He had spoken all the time with the primrose in his mouth, and now he leaned back and took the flower from his mouth and spat away an inch of bitten stalk and put it back again. There was something about the paleness of the primrose against his dark face that made him doubly arresting.

They stared at each other in silence, their eyes languid and bold and unflickering.

"Where are you making for?" he asked suddenly.

"Liverpool," she said.

He looked at the perambulator. Then he glanced at her shoes. He noticed for the first time her blistered feet through the soles. He looked at her sharply.

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" You're a hell of a way from Liverpool," he said. " A hell of a way."

She did not answer. The smell of the coffee was strong in the wood, and there was no sound except the whistling of a blackbird and of bees booming softly in the yellow-dusty sallow blooms. She reached over to the bundle and brought out two blue enamel cups and poured out the coffee and handed a cup to him.

" No sugar," she said in a languid voice.

He fumbled in his pocket and brought out a packet of yellow sugar and set it on the earth between them and nodded towards the sleeping man.

" Going to wake him ? " he said.

She shrugged her shoulders and tasted the coffee.

" What's wrong with him ? " he said.

She crooked her elbow and smiled ironically and took a deep drink of her coffee.

" Like a fish," she said.

He nodded and looked at the thin white face more closely. It seemed very young.

" Twenty five," she said. " And he was a fine kid. But now—" she laid her two hands just above her breasts and shook her head.

The man took the primrose from his mouth and threw it on the earth and began to drink his coffee. The sunshine came warmly down on his face, and as he tilted back his head he felt the intent and sleepy gaze of the woman on his face, too.

" Where are you going yourself ? " she said.

He finished drinking and wiped his lips and stared at her body, admiring her.

" I want to get to Bristol and find a ship and get to Valparaiso," he said. " I'm sick of this country. I used to know a man in Valparaiso. I made some money there at one time."

She nodded her head and took another drink of her coffee and repeated thoughtfully :

" Valparaiso."

He drained his coffee and spat the grounds from his mouth and leaned back on one elbow. The place where they were sitting was for the space of a foot or two without shadow, and the spring sunshine poured full on the woman's head, so that her hair seemed more than ever golden and the strength and passion in her face finer in the yellow light. The old orange jersey had a row of buttons at her breast, but the first was missing and the second had slipped from its buttonhole. Her breast gleamed soft and fair against the dirty orange stuff, and half unconsciously her hand moved and she did up the button afresh. But when her hand dropped back to

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her knees the swelling of her breast burst it apart again.

"What's it like in a place like Valparaiso?" she said suddenly.

"You know as well as I do."

She nodded.

"If the good God just thinks fit, it can be wonderful," he went on. "In one month in Valparaiso, I made five hundred pounds. And easy, too. I made it too easy. I wasn't satisfied. I thought I could go down to Buenos Aires and make a lot more. I lost every penny in a fortnight. Then I went up to Panama and on to Cuba and over to San Francisco. I made a bit of money sometimes, but I could never keep it long. Now I want to get back to Valparaiso. But if things go wrong I daresay I shall want to get back here again."

His voice was deep and easy and there was something nonchalant and ironical and dreamy about his words. The woman sat watching him with an expression of undisguised intensity, contemplating his dark face with a marvellous steadiness of her sleepy eyes, lost in thought.

She seemed in that moment extraordinarily young, her face transformed by a moment of the strangest rapture. She looked at him candidly and enviously, and then suddenly with a glance of full-blooded passion, too, her eyes wide and perfectly childlike, her bosom falling and heaving rapidly.

They sat for a moment and watched each other again like two animals. His lips gradually assumed a little sardonic smile, but she never changed her expression of marvellous intensity. The sun was warming the primroses and the sallow bloom, and the air was filled with the soft scents of them, the smell of wood smoke and the strong odour of earth.

The man beneath the tree stirred suddenly in his sleep and began to breathe heavily, like someone drunk, without waking.

The sound upset the woman. In a moment the fine expression on her face was lost. The sardonic, dreamy smile vanished from the lips of the man, too. He stood up.

"I'll push on," he said.

The woman rose to her feet also and stretched her arms over her head with a motion of weariness. In the moment that the orange jersey and the black skirt were pulled skin-tight over her rigid body he saw that she was pregnant.

She lowered her arms with a sigh, her magnificent body all languorous and heavy with its burden of strength and life. She yawned, and then smiled at him when she had finished the yawn.

"You're not so very old?" he said.

"Twenty nine."

"And some," he guessed ironically.

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"No." She shook her head. "Twenty nine."

"I believe you," he said.

He looked straight into her eyes and nodded, thinking for one moment of the sleepy man, the perambulator, her shoes, her lacerated feet and her pregnancy. She returned his look with some of the old intensity, but now as though she were thinking of something else, very far away.

"Well, I'll get on," he said. "What'll you do if you get to Liverpool?"

She lifted her face a fraction towards the sun and shook her head. Instantly he turned away his head, as if he regretted bitterly having spoken.

"So long. Good luck for Valparaiso," she said.

"So long," he said. "Good luck for Liverpool."

They looked at each other for a single instant, and something warm and tender flashed between them before he turned away and began to stride through the wood towards the road.

The wands of the hazel trees kept whipping back as he passed and the pollen was shaken from the thick catkins, and a golden dust came falling through the beams of sunlight slanting between the trees. The sound of the swaying branches and cracking whips grew rapidly farther and farther away, and the hazel trees trembled less and less and finally became still again.

The woman sat down, rested her face in her hands and stared in thought at the primroses and the sleeping man. The last of the branches swayed to rest in its place again and the wood was silent.

* * *

SOME DELAY

On his way back from the Lake District recently a tourist drew up hungrily at an inn which advertised ham and eggs.

"Can I get a meal here?" he asked the landlord.

"Yes," was the reply. "I can give you tea and cakes."

"Tea and cakes!" exclaimed the tourist. "What about ham and eggs?"

"Sorry," said the landlord, "not until later."

Good enough, the tourist decided that ham and eggs were worth waiting for.

But an hour passed without even an appetizing smell. Hungrier than ever, he went in search of the landlord. "When *do* you start serving the ham and eggs?" he enquired.

The landlord pondered. "Oh," he said, "about the end of November."

From The Yorkshire Post

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Letter To A Friend

WHEN red raindrops cling to the red ripeness of cherries,
when sheep return washed white by the rain to the sheep-fold—
will the dew then fall on the iron-wrought grill of your window?
will the swallow bear you rain on its tender wing-tips?
will you hear the horseshoes splash through the shallow warmness of pools?

I will write you a long long letter, as though by the rain it was written
when the shower was past and tiny rice-drops fell . . .
I will pen tiny strokes to tell how the branches shudder
and how within me two hearts sing a double song:
and one of them sings like a bird for a joy of the dewy ploughlands,
of the after-grass that grows thick as a horse's mane . . .

Since you will not be here to step through the waist-high dew-sprinkled grass,
since you will not be here to tend the rain-washed sheep in the sheep-fold,
since you will not be here to gather the apples, the grapes and apples.

When the sun lights a delicate fire in the meadows, the fields and the pastures
I will drink your health in dew from a corn-poppy's flaming cup.
I will write you a letter that you may hear how the thin twigs tremble,
how the grass pushes up, what the warm leaves whisper together—
No, no! I will carry the page spread widely to catch the raindrops,
let the rain write the letter itself, let the raindrops write you my song!

Translated by WALTER MORISON *from the Serbocroat of*
RADOVAN ZOGOVIC

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THE SECOND HOUSE OF USHER

"As of this day, Beware!" he said. "We are open for business"

by RAY BRADBURY

"'*DURING the whole of a dull, dark, and soundless day in the autumn of the year, when the clouds hung oppressively low in the heavens, I had been passing alone, on horseback, through a singularly dreary tract of country; and at length found myself, as the shades of evening drew on, within view of the melancholy House of Usher . . .*'"

Mr. William Stendahl paused in his quotation. There, upon a low black hill, stood the House, its cornerstone bearing the inscription 2005 A.D.

Mr. Bigelow, the architect, said, "It's completed. Here's the key, Mr. Stendahl."

The two men stood together silently in the quiet autumn afternoon. Blueprints rustled on the raven grass at their feet.

"The House of Usher," said Mr. Stendahl with pleasure. "Planned, built, bought, paid for. Wouldn't Mr. Poe be *delighted*?"

Mr. Bigelow squinted. "Is it everything you wanted, sir?"

"Yes!"

"Is the colour right? Is it *desolate* and *terrible*?"

"Very desolate, very terrible!"

"The walls are—*bleak*?"

"Amazingly so!"

"The tarn, is it 'black and lurid' enough?"

"Most incredibly black and lurid."

"And the sedge—we've dyed it, you know—is it the proper grey and ebon?"

"Hideous!"

Mr. Bigelow consulted his architectural plans. From these he quoted in part: "Does the whole structure cause 'an iciness, a sickening of the heart, a dreariness of thought'? The House, the lake, the land, Mr. Stendahl?"

"Mr. Bigelow, it's worth every penny! By heaven, it's beautiful!"

"Thank you. I had to work in total ignorance. Thank goodness you had your own private rockets or we'd never have been allowed to bring our equipment through. You notice, it's always

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twilight here, this land, always November, barren, sterile, dead. It took a bit of doing. We killed everything. Ten thousand tons of D.D.T. Not a snake, frog, or Martian fly left! Twilight always, Mr. Stendahl. I'm proud of that. There are machines, hidden, which blot out the sun. It's always properly 'dreary.'"

Stendahl drank it in, the dreariness, the oppression, the fetid vapours, the whole 'atmosphere,' so delicately contrived and fitted. And that House! That crumbling horror, that evil lake, the fungi, the extensive decay! Plastic or otherwise, who could guess?

He looked at the autumn sky. Somewhere above, beyond, far off, was the sun. Somewhere it was the month of April on the planet Mars, a yellow month with a blue sky. Somewhere above, the rockets burned down to civilize a beautifully dead planet. The sound of their screaming passage was muffled by this dim, soundproofed world, this ancient autumn world.

"Now that my job's done," said Mr. Bigelow uneasily, "I feel free to ask what you're going to do with all this."

"With the second House of Usher? Haven't you guessed?"

"No."

"Does the name Usher mean nothing to you?"

"Nothing."

"Well, what about *this* name: Edgar Allan Poe?"

Mr. Bigelow shook his head.

"Of course." Stendahl snorted delicately, a combination of dismay and contempt. "How could I expect you to know blessed Mr. Poe? He died a long while ago. All of his books were burned in the Great Fire. That's thirty years ago—1975."

"Ah," said Mr. Bigelow wisely. "One of *those*!"

"Yes, one of those, Bigelow. He and all the other authors of tales of terror and fantasy and horror and, for that matter, tales of the future were burned. Heartlessly. They passed a law. Oh, it started in a very small way. In 1950 and '60 it was a grain of sand. They began by controlling books of cartoons and then detective books and, of course, films, one way or another, one group or another, political bias, religious prejudice, union pressures; there was always a minority afraid of something, and a great majority afraid of the dark, afraid of the future, afraid of the past, afraid of the present, afraid of themselves and shadows of themselves."

"I see."

"And with a screw tightened here, a bolt fastened there, a push, a pull, a yank, art and literature were soon like a great twine of taffy strung about, being twisted in braids and tied in knots and thrown in all directions, until there was no more resiliency and no more savour to it. Then the film cameras stopped short and the theatres turned dark, and the printing presses trickled down from a great

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Niagara of reading matter to a mere innocuous dripping of ' pure ' material. Oh, the word ' escape ' was radical, too, I can tell you ! "

" Was it ? "

" It was ! Every man, they said, must face reality. Must face the Here and Now ! Everything that was *not so* must go. All the beautiful literary lies and flights of fancy must be shot in mid-air ! So they lined them up against a library wall one Sunday morning thirty years ago, in 1975 ; they lined them up, St. Nicholas and the Headless Horseman and Snow White and Rumpelstiltzkin and Mother Goose—oh, what a wailing !—and shot them down, and burned the paper castles and the fairy frogs and old kings and the people who lived happily ever after—for of course it was a fact that *nobody* lived happily ever after !—and Once Upon A Time became No More !

" And they spread the ashes of the Phantom Rickshaw with the rubble of the Land of Oz. The Beanstalk died in a bramble of red tape ! Sleeping Beauty awoke at the kiss of a scientist and expired at the fatal puncture of his syringe. And they made Alice drink something from a bottle which reduced her to a size where she could no longer cry ' Curiouser and curiouser,' and they gave the Looking Glass one hammer blow to smash it and every Red King and Oyster away ! "

He clenched his fists. Lord, how immediate it was ! His face was red and he was gasping for breath.

As for Mr. Bigelow, he was astounded at this long explosion. He blinked and at last said, " Sorry. Don't know what you're talking about. Just names to me. From what I hear, the Burning was a good thing."

" Get out ! " screamed Stendahl. " You've done your job, now let me alone, you fool ! "

Mr. Bigelow summoned his carpenters and went away.

Mr. Stendahl stood alone before his House.

" Listen here," he said to the unseen rockets. " I came to Mars to get away from you Clean Minded people, but you're flocking in thicker every day, like flies to offal. So I'm going to show you. I'm going to teach you a fine lesson for what you did to Mr. Poe on Earth. As of this day, beware. The House of Usher is open for business ! "

He shook a fist at the sky.

The rocket landed. A man stepped out jauntily. He glanced at the House, and his grey eyes were displeased and vexed. He strode across the moat to confront the small man there.

" Your name is Stendahl ? "

" Yes."

" I'm Garrett, Investigator of Moral Climates."

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" So you finally got to Mars, you Moral Climate people ? I wondered when you'd appear."

" We arrived last week. We'll soon have things as neat and tidy as Earth." The man waved an identification card irritably towards the House. " Suppose you tell me about this place, Stendahl ? "

" It's a haunted castle, if you like."

" I don't like, Stendahl, I *don't* like. The sound of that word ' haunted.' "

" Simple enough. In this year of our Lord 2005 I have built a mechanical sanctuary. In it copper bats fly on electronic beams, brass rats scuttle in plastic cellars, robot skeletons dance ; robot vampires, harlequins, wolves, and white phantoms, compounded of chemicals and ingenuity, live here."

" That's what I was afraid of," said Garrett, smiling quietly. " I'm afraid we're going to have to tear your place down."

" I knew you'd come out as soon as you discovered what went on."

" I'd have come sooner, but we at Moral Climates wanted to be sure of your intentions before we moved in. We can have the Dismantlers and Burning Crew here by suppertime. By midnight your place will be razed to the cellar. Mr. Stendahl, I consider you somewhat of a fool, sir. Spending hard earned money on such folly. Why, it must have cost you more than a million pounds—"

" Two million ! " agreed Stendahl. " But, Mr. Garrett, I inherited twenty million when very young. I can afford to throw it about. Seems a dreadful shame, though, to have the House finished only an hour and have you race out with your Dismantlers. Couldn't you possibly let me play with my Toy for just, well, twenty four hours ? "

" You know the law. Strict to the letter. No books, no houses, nothing to be produced which in any way suggests ghosts, vampires, fairies, or any creature of the imagination. You've caused us a lot of trouble, Mr. Stendahl. We have it on record. Twenty years ago. On Earth. You and your library."

" Yes, me and my library. And a few others like me. Oh, Poe's been forgotten for many years now, and Oz and the other creatures. But I had my little cache. We had our libraries, a few private citizens, until you sent your men around with torches and incinerators and tore my fifty thousand books up and burned them. Just as you put a stake through the heart of Hallowe'en. Oh, you and your realism ! Your Here, your Now, your Hell ! "

" It doesn't pay to be bitter ! "

" Mr. Garrett, you must turn in a full report, mustn't you ? "

" Yes."

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" Then, for curiosity's sake, you'd better come in and look around. It'll take only a minute."

" All right. Lead the way. And no tricks. I've a gun with me."

The door to the House of Usher creaked wide. A moist wind issued forth. There was an immense sighing and moaning, like a subterranean bellows breathing in the lost catacombs.

A rat pranced across the floor stones. Garrett, crying out, gave it a kick. The rat fell over and from its nylon fur streamed an incredible horde of metal fleas.

" Amazing ! " Garrett bent to see.

An old witch sat in a niche, quivering her wax hands over some orange and blue playing cards. She jerked her head and hissed through her toothless mouth at Garrett, tapping her greasy cards.

" Death ! " she cried.

" Now *that's* the sort of thing I mean," said Garrett. " Deplorable ! "

" I'll let you burn her personally."

" Will you, really ? " Garrett was pleased. Then he frowned. " I must say you're taking this pretty well."

" It was enough just to be able to create this place. To be able to say I did it. To say I nurtured a mediæval atmosphere in a modern, incredulous world."

" I've a somewhat reluctant admiration for your genius myself, sir." Garrett watched a mist drift by, whispering and whispering, shaped like a beautiful and nebulous woman. Down a moist corridor a machine whirled. Like the stuff from a candy floss centrifuge, mists sprang up and floated, murmuring, in the silent halls.

An ape appeared out of nowhere.

" Hold on ! " cried Garrett.

" Don't be afraid." Stendahl tapped the animal's black chest. "A robot. Copper skeleton and all, like the witch. See ? " He stroked the fur, and under it metal tubing came to light.

" Yes." Garrett put out a timid hand to pet the thing. " But why, Mr. Stendahl, why all *this* ? What obsessed you ? "

" Bureaucracy gone mad, Mr. Garrett. But I haven't time to explain. The government will discover soon enough." He nodded to the ape. " All right. *Now.*"

The ape killed Mr. Garrett.

" Are we almost ready, Pikes ? "

Pikes looked up from the table. " Yes, sir."

" You've done a splendid job."

" Well, I'm paid for it, Mr. Stendahl," said Pikes softly as he

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lifted the plastic eyelid of the robot and inserted the glass eyeball to fasten the rubberoid muscles neatly. " There."

" The spitting image of Mr. Garrett."

" What do we do with him, sir ? " Pikes nodded at the slab where the real Mr. Garrett lay dead.

" Better burn him, Pikes. We wouldn't want two Mr. Garretts, would we ? "

Pikes wheeled Mr. Garrett to the brick incinerator. " Goodbye." He pushed Mr. Garrett in and slammed the door.

Stendahl confronted the robot Garrett. " You have your orders, Garrett ? "

" Yes, sir." The robot sat up. " I'm to return to Moral Climates. I'll file a complementary report. Delay action for at least forty eight hours. Say I'm investigating more fully."

" Right, Garrett. Goodbye."

The robot hurried out to Garrett's rocket, got in, and flew away.

Stendahl turned. " Now, Pikes, we send the remainder of the invitations for tonight. I think we'll have a jolly time, don't you ? "

" Considering we waited twenty years, quite jolly ! "

They winked at each other.

Seven o'clock. Stendahl studied his watch. It was almost time. Twirling the sherry glass in his hand, he sat quietly. Above him, among the oaken beams, the bats, their delicate copper bodies hidden under rubber flesh, blinked at him and shrieked. He raised his glass to them. " To our success." Then he leaned back, closed his eyes, and considered the entire affair.

How he would savour this in his old age. This paying back of the antiseptic government for its literary terrors and conflagrations. Oh, how the anger and hatred had grown in him through the years. Oh, how the plan had taken a slow shape in his numbed mind, until that day three years ago when he had met Pikes.

Ah yes, Pikes. Pikes with the bitterness in him as deep as a black, charred well of green acid. Who was Pikes ? Only the greatest of them all ! Pikes, the man of ten thousand faces, a fury, a smoke, a blue fog, a white rain, a bat, a gargoyle, a monster, that was Pikes ! Greater than Lon Chaney, the father ? Stendahl ruminated. Night after night he had watched Chaney in the old, old films. Yes, better than Chaney. Better than that other ancient mummer ? What was his name ? Karloff ? Far better ! No, there was only one Pikes, and he was a man stripped of his fantasies now, no place on Earth to go, no one to show off to. Forbidden even to perform for himself before a mirror !

Poor impossible, defeated Pikes ! How must it have felt, Pikes, the night they seized your films, like entrails yanked from the

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camera, clutching them in rolls and wads to stuff them in a stove to burn away! Did it feel as bad as having some fifty thousand books annihilated with no recompense? Yes. Yes. Stendahl felt his hands grow cold with the senseless anger. So what more natural than they would one day talk over endless coffeepots into innumerable midnights, and out of all the talk and the bitter brewings would come —the House of Usher.

A great church bell rang. The guests were arriving.

Smiling, he went to greet them.

Full grown without memory, the robots waited. In green silks the colour of forest pools, in silks the colour of frog and fern, they waited. In yellow hair the colour of the sun and sand, the robots waited.

Oiled, with tube bones cut from bronze and sunk in gelatine, the robots lay. In coffins for the not dead and not alive, in planked boxes, the metronomes waited to be set in motion. There was a smell of lubrication and lathed brass. There was a silence of the tomb yard. Sexed but sexless, the robots waited. Named but unnamed, and borrowing from humans everything but humanity, the robots stared at the nailed lids of their labelled boxes, in a death that was not even a death, for there had never been a life.

And now there was a vast screaming of yanked nails. Now there was a lifting of lids. Now there were shadows on the boxes and the pressure of a hand squirting oil from a can. Now one clock was set in motion, a faint ticking. Now another and another, until this was an immense clock shop, purring. The marble eyes rolled wide their rubber lids. The nostrils twitched.

The robots, clothed in hair of ape and white of rabbit, arose: Tweedledum following Tweedledee, Mock Turtle, Dormouse, drowned bodies from the sea compounded of salt and whiteweed, swaying; hanging blue-throated men with turned-up clam-flesh eyes, and creatures of ice and burning tinsel, loam-dwarfs and pepper elves, Tik-Tok, Ruggedo, St. Nicholas with a self-made snow flurry blowing on before him, Bluebeard with whiskers like acetylene flame, and sulphur clouds from which green fire snouts protruded, and, in scaly and gigantic serpentine, a dragon with a furnace in its belly reeled out of the door with a scream, a tick, a bellow, a silence, a rush, a wind. Ten thousand lids fell back. The clock shop moved out into Usher. The night was enchanted.

A warm breeze came over the land. The guest rockets, burning the sky and turning the weather from autumn to spring, arrived.

The men stepped out in evening clothes and the women stepped out after them, their hair coiffed up in elaborate detail.

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" So *that's* Usher ! "

" But where's the door ? "

At this moment Stendahl appeared. The women laughed and chattered. Mr. Stendahl raised a hand to quiet them. Turning, he looked up to a high castle window and called :

" Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your hair."

And from above, a beautiful maiden leaned out upon the night wind and let down her golden hair. And the hair twined and blew and became a ladder upon which the guests might ascend, laughing, into the House.

What eminent sociologists !. What clever psychologists ! What tremendously important politicians, bacteriologists, and neurologists! There they stood, within the dank walls.

" Welcome, all of you ! "

Mr. Tryon, Mr. Owen, Mr. Dunne, Mr. Lang, Mr. Steffens, Mr. Fletcher, and a dozen-dozen more.

" Come in, come in ! "

Miss Gibbs, Miss Pope, Miss Churchil, Miss Blunt, Miss Drummond, and a score of other women, glittering.

Eminent, eminent people, one and all, members of the Society for the Prevention of Fantasy, advocators of the banishment of Hallowe'en and Guy Fawkes, killers of bats, burners of books, bearers of torches ; good clean citizens, every one, who had waited until the rough men had come up and buried the Martians and cleansed the cities and built the towns and repaired the highways and made everything safe.

And then, with everything well on its way to Safety, the Spoil-Funs, the people with mercurochrome for blood and iodine coloured eyes, came now to set up their Moral Climates and dole out goodness to everyone. And they were his friends ! Yes, carefully, carefully, he had met and befriended each of them on Earth in the last year !

" Welcome to the vasty halls of Death ! " he cried.

" Hello, Stendahl, what *is* all this ? "

" You'll see. Everyone off with your clothes. You'll find booths to one side there. Change into costumes you find there. Men on this side, women on that."

The people stood uneasily about.

" I don't know if we should stay," said Miss Pope. " I don't like the looks of this. It verges on—blasphemy."

" Nonsense, a *costume* ball ! "

" Seems quite illegal." Mr. Steffens sniffed about.

" Come off it." Stendahl laughed. " Enjoy yourselves. Tomorrow it'll be a ruin. Get in the booths ! "

The House blazed with life and colour ; harlequins rang by with belled caps and white mice danced miniature quadrilles to the music

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of dwarfs who tickled tiny fiddles with tiny bows, and flags rippled from scorched beams while bats flew in clouds about gargoyle mouths which spouted down wine, cool, wild, and foaming. A creek wandered through the seven rooms of the masked ball. Guests sipped and found it to be sherry. Guests poured from the booths, transformed from one age into another, their faces covered with dominoes, the very act of putting on a mask revoking all their licenses to pick a quarrel with fantasy and horror. The women swept about in red gowns, laughing. The men danced them attendance. And on the walls were shadows with no people to throw them, and here or there were mirrors in which no image showed.

" All of us vampires ! " laughed Mr. Fletcher. " Dead ! "

There were seven rooms, each a different colour, one blue, one purple, one green, one orange, another white, the sixth violet, and the seventh shrouded in black velvet. And in the black room was an ebony clock which struck the hour loud. And through these rooms the guests ran, drunk at last, among the robot fantasies, amid the Dormice and Mad Hatters, the Trolls and Giants, the Black Cats and White Queens, and under their dancing feet the floor gave off the massive pumping beat of a hidden and tell-tale heart.

" Mr. Stendahl ! "

A whisper.

" Mr. Stendahl ! "

A monster with the face of Death stood at his elbow. It was Pikes. " I must see you alone."

" What is it ? "

" Here." Pikes held out a skeleton hand. In it were a few half-melted, charred wheels, nuts, cogs, bolts.

Stendahl looked at them for a long moment. Then he drew Pikes into a corridor. " Garrett ? " he whispered.

Pikes nodded. " He sent a robot in his place. Cleaning out the incinerator a moment ago, I found these."

They both stared at the fateful cogs for a time.

" This means the police will be here any minute," said Pikes. " Our plan will be ruined."

" I don't know." Stendahl glanced in at the whirling yellow and blue and orange people. The music swept through the misting halls. " I should have guessed Garrett wouldn't be fool enough to come in person. But wait ! "

" What's the matter ? "

" Nothing. There's nothing the matter. Garrett sent a robot to us. Well, we sent one back. Unless he checks closely, he won't notice the switch."

" Of course ! "

" Next time he'll come *himself*. Now that he thinks it's safe.

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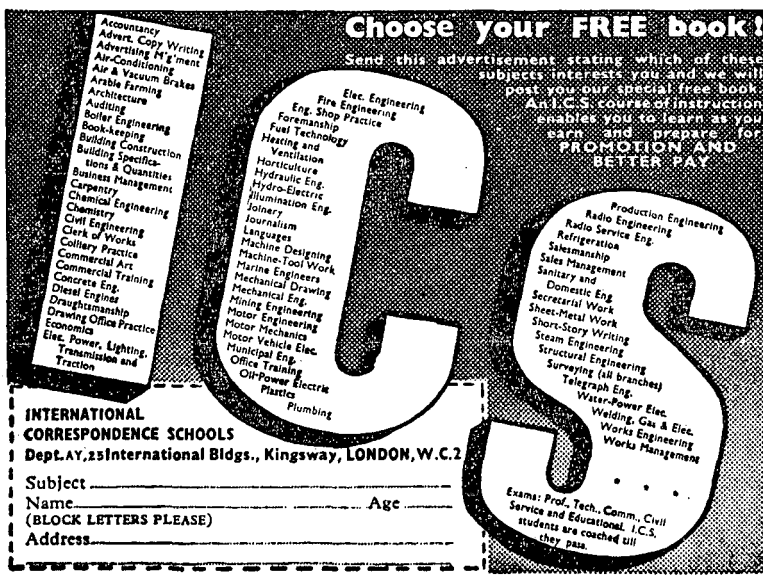

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Why, he might be at the door any minute, *in person!* More wine, Pikes!"

The great bell rang.

"There he is now, I'll bet you. Go and let Mr. Garrett in."

Rapunzel let down her golden hair.

"Mr. Stendahl?"

"Mr. Garrett. The *real* Mr. Garrett?"

"The same." Garrett eyed the dank walls and the whirling people. "I thought I'd better come and see for myself. You can't depend on robots. Other people's robots, especially. I also took the precaution of summoning the Dismantlers. They'll be here in one hour to knock the props out from under this horrible place."

Stendahl bowed. "Thanks for telling me." He waved his hand. "In the meantime, you might as well enjoy this. A little wine?"

"No, thank you. What's going on? How low can a man sink?"

"See for yourself, Mr. Garrett."

"Murder," said Garrett.

"Murder most foul," said Stendahl.

A woman screamed. Miss Pope ran up, her face the colour of a cheese. "The most horrid thing just happened! I saw Miss Blunt strangled by an ape and stuffed up a chimney!"

They looked and saw the long yellow hair trailing down from the flue. Garrett cried out.

"Horrid!" sobbed Miss Pope, and then ceased crying. She blinked and turned. "Miss Blunt!"

"Yes," said Miss Blunt, standing there.

"But I just saw you crammed up the flue!"

"No," laughed Miss Blunt. "A robot of myself. A clever facsimile!"

"But, but . . ."

"Don't cry, darling. I'm quite all right. Let me look at myself. Well, so there I *am!* Up the chimney. Like you said. Isn't that funny?"

Miss Blunt walked away, laughing.

"Have a drink, Garrett?"

"I believe I will. That unnerved me. My word, what a place. This *does* deserve tearing down. For a moment there . . ."

Garrett drank.

Another scream. Mr. Steffens, borne upon the shoulders of four white rabbits, was carried down a flight of stairs which magically appeared in the floor. Into a pit went Mr. Steffens, where, bound and tied, he was left to face the advancing razor steel of a great pendulum which now whirled down, down, closer and closer to his outraged body.

"Is that me down there?" said Mr. Steffens, appearing at

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Garrett's elbow. He bent over the pit. " How strange, how odd, to see yourself die."

The pendulum made a final stroke.

" How realistic," said Mr. Steffens, turning away.

" Another drink, Mr. Garrett ? "

" Yes, please."

" It won't be long. The Dismantlers will be here."

" Thank God ! "

And for a third time, a scream.

" What now ? " said Garrett apprehensively.

" It's my turn," said Miss Drummond. " Look."

And a second Miss Drummond, shrieking, was nailed into a coffin and thrust into the raw earth under the floor.

" Why, I remember *that*," gasped the Investigator of Moral Climates. " From the old forbidden books. The Premature Burial. And the others. The Pit, the Pendulum, and the ape, the chimney, the Murders in the Rue Morgue. In a book I burned, yes ! "

" Another drink, Garrett. Here, hold your glass steady."

" My word, you *have* an imagination, haven't you ? "

They stood and watched five others die, one in the mouth of a dragon, the others thrown off into the black tarn, sinking and vanishing.

" Would you like to see what we have planned for you ? " asked Stendahl.

" Certainly," said Garrett. " What's the difference ? We'll blow the whole damn thing up, anyway."

" Come along then. This way." And he led Garrett down into the floor, through numerous passages and down again upon spiral stairs into the earth, into the catacombs.

" What do you want to show me down here ? " said Garrett.

" Yourself killed."

" A duplicate ? "

" Yes. And also something else."

" What ? "

" The Amontillado," said Stendahl, going ahead with a blazing lantern which he held high. Skeletons froze half out of coffin lids. Garrett held his hand to his nose, his face disgusted.

" The what ? "

" Haven't you ever heard of the Amontillado ? "

" No ! "

" Don't you recognize this ? " Stendahl pointed to a cell.

" Should I ? "

" Or this ? " Stendahl produced a trowel from under his cape.

" What's that thing ? "

" Come," said Stendahl.

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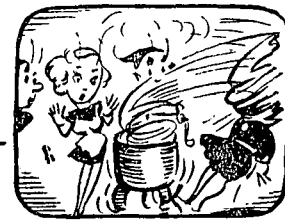

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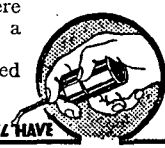

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They stepped into the cell. In the dark, Stendahl affixed the chains to the half-drunken man.

"For God's sake, what are you doing?" shouted Garrett, rattling about.

"I'm being ironic. Don't interrupt a man in the midst of being ironic; it's not polite. There!"

"You've locked me in chains!"

"So I have."

"What are you going to do?"

"Leave you here."

"You're joking."

"A very good joke."

"Where's my duplicate? Don't we see him killed?"

"There is no duplicate."

"But the *others!*"

"The others are dead. The ones you saw killed were the real people. The duplicates, the robots, stood by and watched."

Garrett said nothing.

"Now you're supposed to say, 'For the love of God, Montresor!'" said Stendahl. "And I will reply, 'Yes, for the love of God.' Won't you say it? Come on. Say it."

"You fool."

"Must I coax you? Say it. Say 'For the love of God, Montresor!'"

"I won't, you idiot. Get me out of here." He was sober now.

"Here. Put this on." Stendahl tossed in something that belled and rang.

"What is it?"

"A cap and bells. Put it on and I might let you out."

"Stendahl!"

"Put it on, I said!"

Garrett obeyed. The bells tinkled.

"Don't you have a feeling that this has all happened before?" enquired Stendahl, setting to work with trowel and mortar and brick.

"What're you doing?"

"Walling you in. Here's one row. Here's another."

"You're insane!"

"I won't argue that point."

"You'll be prosecuted for this!"

But Stendahl just tapped a brick and placed it on the wet mortar, humming.

Now there was a thrashing and pounding and a crying out from within the darkening place. The bricks rose higher. "More thrashing, please," said Stendahl. "Let's make it a good show."

"Let me out, let me out!"

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There was one last brick. The screaming was continuous.

" Garrett ? " called Stendahl softly. Garrett silenced himself. " Garrett," said Stendahl, " do you know why I've done this to you ? Because you burned Mr. Poe's books without really reading them. You took other people's advice that they needed burning. Otherwise you'd have realized what I was going to do to you when we came down here a moment ago. Ignorance is fatal, Mr. Garrett."

Garrett was silent.

" I want this to be perfect," said Stendahl, holding his lantern up so its light penetrated in upon the slumped figure. " Jingle your bells softly." The bells rustled. " Now, if you'll please say, ' For the love of God, Montresor,' I might let you free."

The man's face came up in the light. There was a hesitation. Then grotesquely the man said, " ' For the love of God, Montresor.' "

" Ah," said Stendahl, eyes closed. He shoved the last brick into place and mortared it tight. " *Requiescat in pace*, dear friend."

He hastened from the catacomb.

In the seven rooms the sound of a midnight clock brought everything to a halt. The Red Death appeared.

Stendahl turned for a moment at the door to watch. And then he ran out across the moat, to where a helicopter waited.

" Ready, Pikes ? "

" Ready."

" There it goes ! "

They looked at the great House, smiling. It began to crack down the middle, as with an earthquake, and as Stendahl watched the magnificent sight he heard Pikes reciting behind him in a low, cadenced voice :

" ' . . . *my brain reeled as I saw the mighty walls rushing asunder—there was a long tumultuous shouting sound like a voice of a thousand waters—and the deep and dank tarn at my feet closed sullenly and silently over the fragments of the House of Usher.*' "

The helicopter rose over the steaming lake and flew into the west.

* * *

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 160

Across. 1, Morning glory. 9, Operate. 10, In place. 11, Exit. 12, Pater. 13, Miss. 16, On guard. 17, Silvery. 18, Hessian. 21, Transit. 23, Daub. 24, Swoon. 25, Peri. 28, Granada. 29, Ostrich. 30, Weather glass.

Down. 1, Meeting. 2, Roar. 3, Iceland. 4, Gaiters. 5, Lope. 6, Realise. 7, Gone to the dogs. 8, Red sky at night. 14, Rabid. 15, Float. 19, Sausage. 20, New face. 21, Too long. 22, Species. 26, Dart. 27, Etna.

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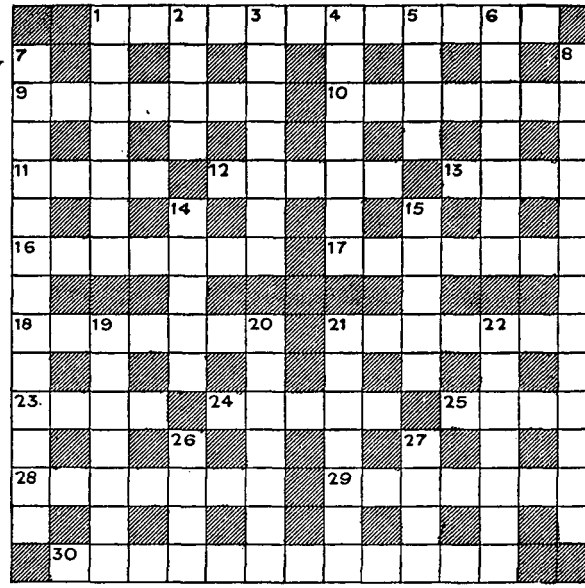
ARGOSY CROSS WORD

Solution on page 159



CLUES

Across

1 Flower of the midsummer dawn? (7, 5).

9 Act, but give a musical entertainment first (7).

10 All very neat and proper but not the winner (2, 5).

11 The way out of perplexity (4).

12 The breadwinner—but put the last letter second and the old man talks foolishly! (5).

13 It's as good as a mile (4).

16 Warming position for the fencer (2, 5).

17 This moon is popular with rhymesters (7).

18 Material for a foreign soldier (7).

21 Tin rats can't be reformed, but they're being got over! (7).

23 The way to cover a Channel swimmer (4).

24 Has the heart to court, but temporarily overcome! (5).

25 Mythical ingredient of aperitif (4).

28 Fine place in Southern Spain? (7).

29 Long legged beast that never comes to a poor end (7).

30 Container of a bright or stormy cocktail? (7, 5).

Down

1 English rendezvous (7).

2 Announce in better oarsman (4).

3 Surely the leading exporters of refrigerators (7).

4 Enhancers of Grandpa's ankles? (7).

5 The hare's step? (4).

6 Lies are the making of it, please understand (7).

7 The kennelmaid's outing, and her ruin? (4, 2, 3, 4).

8 Foreboding dry sheep? (3, 3, 2, 5).

14 Headstrong form of trimming? (5).

15 The angler's hopes rise if this sinks (5).

19 Food that is wise around many states (7).

20 The latest inmate, or the beautician's finished result (3, 4).

21 Sounds like a French town, but needs shortening (3, 4).

22 Kinds of hard money (7).

26 This little river sounds very flighty (4).

27 The neat high spot of the Mediterranean? (4).

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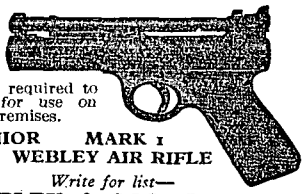

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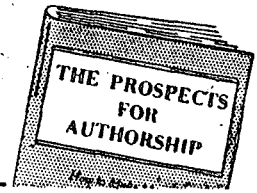
Student 357/3015: I have had my story accepted by **BLACKWOODS** who are paying me £25 for it . . . *Student 778/2119:* I thought it might interest you to know that **THE COUNTRYMAN** has accepted a short article of mine on an old country custom . . . *Student 184/315:* As you suggested, I submitted the articles to the **NEW STATESMAN.** One was published on the 17th July. I have also had an article accepted by **MEN ONLY** . . . *Student 181/282:* You may be interested to hear that I had a letter from the Editor of **ARGOSY**; they have offered me Twenty-five Guineas for my story . . . *Student 591/287:* You will be pleased that my article submitted for my Second Lesson was published in the **DAILY MIRROR** and I received Six Guineas for it . . . *Student 120/283:* I have established contact with the Editor of **PUNCH.** The item was accepted for "Charivaria" and is a good start . . . *Student 1179/347:* I succeeded in getting four Big Game stories into **COURIER** and another about "Shrove Tuesday." Another article appeared in the August issue of **BLACKWOODS** . . . *Student 1954/157:* I have just corrected a proof of my story for **WIDE WORLD**; they have since accepted another and I have sent in a third . . . *Student 171/162:* I have sold my story to **EVERYWOMAN** for 25 guineas . . . *Student 1106/156:* The B.B.C. accepted the script for the Light Programme—fee 9 guineas—after my first lesson . . . *Student 141/76:* The article which I wrote for the Second Test Paper appeared in the **SUNDAY MAIL.** Thanks for the recommendation.



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